



Analyzing The Role of Digital Transformation in Shaping Entrepreneurial Marketing Strategies within Emerging Economies

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ABSTRACT

The present research investigated how digital transformation (DT) affects the entrepreneurial marketing (EM) strategies of the agricultural small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in the Abia State, Nigeria, with the mediation of the digital dynamic capabilities (DDC). These were aimed at establishing the connection between DT and EM, the connection between DT and DDC, and the intermediating role of DDC between the connection between DT and EM. The research took a quantitative research design and used a structured questionnaire to be administered on 150 agricultural SMEs out of which 149 respondents were used and analyzed. The sampling involved convenience sampling because of the constraints in the field and data were compared in correlation statistics. Results indicated that there was strong, positive and statistically significant relationship between DT and EM ($r = 0.721, p < 0.01$), DT and DDC ($r = 0.684, p < 0.01$), and moderate but significant relationship between DDC and EM ($r = 0.531, p < 0.01$). These findings indicate that digital transformation has a positive impact on the performance of entrepreneurial marketing in terms of the creation of dynamic capabilities. The paper has concluded that digital tools, coupled with firm-specific capabilities and adaptive practices, can help to improve innovation, customer relations, and competitiveness among the SMEs in the agricultural sector. It adds to the Dynamic Capabilities Theory and Resource-Based View in demonstrating how the digital capabilities and digital infrastructure lead to the marketing effectiveness in rural economies. The research suggests that agricultural SMEs need to invest in digital literacy and capacity-building programs and the policymakers should enhance rural digital infrastructure and innovation-oriented programs to remain competitive in new markets.

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INTRODUCTION

Digital transformation (DT) has become a pivotal force reshaping industries across the globe. At its core, DT involves the adoption and integration of digital technologies into business operations, fundamentally altering business models, customer interactions, and internal processes (Westerman et al, 2011). As businesses globally strive to remain competitive, particularly in the face of growing uncertainty, the role of entrepreneurial marketing (EM) has evolved, with digital tools enhancing the capacity of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) to innovate, engage customers, and adapt to shifting market dynamics (Xu, Lin et al. 2015). In this context, the ability to effectively utilize digital technologies can be seen as a key driver of competitive advantage. However, the influence of digital transformation on entrepreneurial marketing strategies, particularly in emerging economies, remains insufficiently explored in the academic literature.

In the case of Nigeria, the largest economy in Sub-Saharan Africa, digital transformation presents both significant opportunities and challenges. As the country experiences rapid growth in mobile technology and internet penetration, the potential for digital tools to

enhance business practices, particularly in rural regions like Abia State, is immense (Adam, Ramliy et al. 2020). Despite these opportunities, Nigerian entrepreneurs, especially those in rural areas, face several barriers to fully leveraging digital technologies. These include limited access to high-quality digital infrastructure, low digital literacy, and institutional challenges that impede the widespread adoption of digital tools (Singun 2025). Nonetheless, Nigerian SMEs are increasingly adopting digital strategies, which provide an important avenue for entrepreneurship to flourish in the face of economic challenges. Agricultural entrepreneurs in Abia State, where agriculture remains a key economic driver, are particularly positioned to benefit from digital transformation, yet their marketing strategies remain under-researched.

Agriculture continues to play a crucial role in Nigeria's economy, providing employment to a large portion of the population and contributing significantly to GDP (Igbokwe, Ejeh et al. 2020). However, the sector faces various constraints such as inefficient supply chains, poor market linkages, and limited access to technological resources, all of which undermine the potential for growth and innovation. In recent years, the use of digital tools has begun to transform agricultural marketing, enabling better market outreach, real-time communication, and data-driven decision-making (Abdullahi & Muftau, 2021). Despite these technological advancements, the agricultural sector in Abia State has yet to fully integrate digital transformation within its entrepreneurial marketing practices. Consequently, the impact of digital transformation on agricultural marketing strategies and the role of digital dynamic capabilities (DDC) in mediating this relationship remains largely unexplored.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Existing literature highlights the potential of digital transformation to influence entrepreneurial marketing activities, but few studies have focused on how these changes manifest in rural economies, particularly within agriculture. Moreover, the role of digital dynamic capabilities, firm-specific routines that enable the sensing, seizing, and reconfiguring of digital opportunities, has not been adequately examined in the context of agricultural SMEs in emerging economies (Teece, 2007). While previous research has explored the relationship between DT and business performance in developed countries (Dana, Salamzadeh et al. 2022), there remains a notable gap in understanding how DT specifically influences marketing practices in rural settings, especially within the agricultural sector of Nigeria.

This research seeks to address this gap by examining the role of digital transformation in shaping entrepreneurial marketing strategies in Abia State's agricultural sector. The central research problem this study addresses is the lack of empirical evidence on how digital transformation influences entrepreneurial marketing practices in the context of emerging economies, particularly within rural agricultural settings. More specifically, the study seeks to understand how digital technologies, digital marketing tools, and digital dynamic capabilities contribute to marketing performance outcomes such as customer engagement, market reach, and innovation within this unique setting.

This study proposes a conceptual model where digital transformation influences entrepreneurial marketing practices indirectly through the development of digital dynamic capabilities. The novelty of this study lies in its focus on the mediating role of digital dynamic capabilities, which enable firms to adapt to and capitalize on digital opportunities, thus enhancing their marketing performance. In contrast to traditional studies that treat digital transformation as a direct influence on marketing outcomes, this research introduces a more nuanced view, suggesting that the effectiveness of digital tools in enhancing marketing practices is contingent upon the development of firm-specific capabilities to sense and seize digital opportunities (Teece et al., 1997).

The theoretical framework for this study draws on several established theories. Dynamic Capabilities Theory (Teece, 2007) serves as the primary lens, explaining how firms reconfigure their resources to exploit technological changes. Resource-Based View (RBV) (O'Shannassy 2008) supports the argument that firm-level resources, such as digital infrastructure and human capital, shape the ability of SMEs to respond effectively to digital transformation. The contextual factors that can impact the effectiveness of digital transformation are assessed using the Technology- Organization- Environment (TOE) Framework (Tornatzky and Fleischner, 1990); they include digital infrastructure and institutional support. Also, the marketing behaviors conceptualized through the Entrepreneurial Marketing Theory (Morris, Shin et al. 2006) are applied to achieve the desired performance outcomes in the context of digital transformation through the recognition of opportunities, leveraging resources, and customer intensity.

The current and more digital world is urging businesses in all industries to adjust and become more innovative. One of the primary causes of organizational change has been digital transformation (DT)- the adoption of digital technologies in the process of business. This has transformed the business model, customer engagement, and internal business processes (Westernman et al., 2011). The Dynamic Capabilities Theory (DCT) can also be used to get a good idea of how companies react to these changes. This theory states that companies build dynamic capabilities routines, which allow them to perceive opportunities, exploit them, and reorganize their resources to generate sustainable value in dynamic contexts (Teece, 2007). This is especially applicable to entrepreneurial marketing (EM), which entails proactive, innovative, and resource-leveraging marketing activities applied by SME in uncertain and competitive markets (Raisinghani et al., 2016). Yet, the research on the role of the digital transformation in the entrepreneurial marketing strategy in the environment of the emerging economies, in particular, rural agricultural settings, is limited.

The use of digital technologies in Nigeria has been determined as a decisive element of stimulating economic growth, especially in the agricultural sector (Akinyele and Olatunji, 2020). The high population of Abia State, a mostly rural area with an economy that

depends primarily on agriculture, provides a special background to examine how digital transformation affects the marketing of entrepreneurship. However, as the use of digital tools is becoming more common in the urban centers of Nigeria, rural entrepreneurs in Abia State have to deal with a range of obstacles to capitalizing on digital technologies, such as the lack of digital infrastructure as well as the lack of digital literacy (Olufemi, 2021). Nevertheless, in these hard conditions, the opportunities of digital technologies transforming agricultural marketing are increasingly understood, allowing agricultural marketing to reach the market better and create innovative methods of marketing.

The digital transformation and entrepreneurial marketing literature is mainly based on large businesses and urban SMEs (Liu et al., 2011; Daghfous and Mhedhbi, 2018). But the area that has not received much focus is the transformations in marketing in the rural agricultural areas in the emerging economies due to the digital transformation. This paper fills this gap by using the Dynamic Capabilities Theory to find out the impact of digital transformation on entrepreneurial marketing in agricultural SMEs in Abia State. Precisely, it examines the mediating role of digital technologies and dynamic capabilities in how digital transformation is related to the marketing performance outcomes of customer engagement, market reach, and innovation.

Adopting the Digital Change as a Digital transformation, and applying the Dynamic Capabilities Theory, the research will contribute to a better understanding of how the rural SMEs can use the digital tools and capabilities to achieve entrepreneurial marketing success even despite the difficult conditions.

Hypothesis

H₁: Digital transformation has a significant effect on entrepreneurial marketing practices among agricultural SMEs in Abia State.

H₂: Digital transformation has a significant effect on digital dynamic capabilities among agricultural SMEs in Abia State.

H₃: Digital dynamic capabilities have a significant effect on entrepreneurial marketing practices among agricultural SMEs in Abia State.

Theoretical Underpinnings

This paper is based on the theory of Dynamic Capabilities (DCT) that focuses on the capacity of a firm to respond by adapting, integrating, and reorganizing internal and external competencies to a dynamic environment that changes very quickly. DCT describes how DDC mediates the transformation of DT into marketer outputs of entrepreneurial marketing (Teece, 2007; Le Dinh et al., 2018; Bello et al., 2024). In line with this comes the Resource-Based View (RBV), which supports the significance of firm-specific resources (e.g., digital skills, capital) as a driver of DT-EM alignment (Obiora et al., 2023; Eze and Okonkwo, 2024; Zehrer et al., 2023). Lastly, the conceptualization and testing of the moderating role of infrastructure, policy environment, and organizational preparation on the main relationships of the model are done with the help of the TOBE framework (Adeyeye et al., 2021; Madichie et al., 2024; Ihugba and Anozie-Obe, 2023). The combination of these frameworks allows performing a multi-level analysis of the impact of DT on EM in the framework of DDC under different contextual constraints.

METHODOLOGY

The target population for this study comprises agricultural small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) operating across Abia State, particularly those engaged in varying forms of digital transformation, including the use of digital marketing tools, mobile-based technologies, and other digital platforms to support their entrepreneurial activities. These agricultural SMEs include crop farmers, poultry operators, fish farmers, agro-processing enterprises, food distribution businesses, and market-based agricultural retailers. The study focuses specifically on enterprises that have adopted at least one form of digital tool in their marketing, production, or customer engagement processes.

Given the evolving and highly dispersed nature of agricultural SMEs in Abia State, it was impracticable to determine the exact population size. This challenge is compounded by the absence of a comprehensive database of agricultural SMEs, the large informal sector, and mobility constraints across rural localities. These limitations informed the decision to adopt a pragmatic sampling approach suited to field realities. A total of 150 agricultural SMEs were approached for participation in the study. This number was considered appropriate in line with similar empirical studies investigating digital transformation among SMEs in emerging economies. Due to field constraints and the heterogeneous distribution of agricultural businesses across Abia State, the study adopted a convenience sampling technique to select respondents who were easily accessible and willing to participate.

Convenience sampling was justified because it allowed the researcher to reach agricultural SME operators across multiple rural and semi-urban clusters without formal sampling frames, an approach aligned with Kothari and Gaurav's (2014) assertion that convenience sampling is suitable where accessibility and field realities necessitate flexibility. Respondents included farmers, agro-processors, agricultural produce marketers, food vendors, feed suppliers, and other agriculturally linked SMEs.

Of the 150 questionnaires distributed, 149 were correctly completed and deemed usable for the final analysis.

Data were collected using a structured questionnaire developed to capture the core constructs of the study: digital transformation (DT), digital dynamic capabilities (DDC), entrepreneurial marketing (EM), and marketing performance outcomes. The questionnaire was divided into two major sections:

Section A: Captured socio-demographic and business characteristics such as type of agricultural activity, number of employees, years of operation, and extent of digital exposure.

Section B: Contained items measuring the study variables, operationalized through a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 = Strongly Agree, 2 = Agree, 3 = Disagree, 4 = Undecided, 5 = Strongly Agree.

The instrument was designed based on validated scales from prior literature on digital transformation, dynamic capabilities, and entrepreneurial marketing to ensure theoretical alignment and measurement reliability.

DATA ANALYSIS

Using both mathematical and statistical techniques, this section presents the analysis of the questionnaires administered and retrieved from the sampled respondents, from which our recommendations and conclusions are drawn. A total of 150 questionnaires were sent out to the respondents for data generation, as shown in the table below:

Table 1: Analysis of Questionnaire

Questionnaires	Copies	Percentages (%)
Sent copies	150	100.00
Retrieved	149	99.33
Un-retrieved	1	0.67

Source: Field Work, 2025

From the table above, out of the 150 questionnaires that were administered, 149 of them were retrieved. This represents 99.33% of the total questionnaires administered and used for the study. 1 out of the questionnaires could not be retrieved, representing 0.67%, which is not significant.

Table 2: Gender Distribution of Respondents

Gender	Copies	Percentages (%)
Males	89	59.73
Females	60	40.27
Total	149	100.00

Source: Field Work: 2025

From Table 2 above, it is observed that 89 of the respondents were males, which represented 59.73% of the total respondents. Similarly, 60 of them were females, representing 40.27% of the total respondents. This shows that most of the operators of the understudied SMEs are males.

Table 3: Age Distribution of the Respondents.

Age	Frequency	Percentages (%)
20-25	15	10.07
26-35	23	15.44
36-45	64	42.95
46 and above	47	31.54
Total	149	100.00

Source: Field Work: 2025

Table 3 above indicates that 15 respondents were in the age bracket of 20-25, representing 10.07%. 23 respondents were in the age bracket of 26-35 accounted for 15.44% of the total respondents. 64 of the respondents were in the age bracket of 36-45, representing 42.95% of the respondents. 47 were in the age brackets of 46 and above, representing 31.54% of the total respondents. This shows that most of the respondents/ operators of the understudied SMEs are in the age bracket of 36-45 years old.

Hypotheses Testing

H₀₁: Digital transformation has a significant effect on entrepreneurial marketing practices among agricultural SMEs in Abia State.

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Correlations	GenAI Adoption	Perceived Usefulness
Digital transformation	1.000	.721**
entrepreneurial marketing	.721**	1.000
N	149	149

The correlation result between digital transformation and entrepreneurial marketing ($\rho = 0.721$, $p < 0.01$) indicates a strong, positive, and statistically significant relationship. This implies that the more agricultural business people realize the innovation in digital tools, the higher the chances of them embracing these tools are. The simple fact is that in a situation where business owners clearly understand how digital tools enhance speed, accuracy, productivity, or decision-making in their companies, they are more willing to adopt them. Since the p-value is lower than 0.05, there is rejection of the null hypothesis.

Ho: Digital transformation has a significant effect on digital dynamic capabilities among agricultural SMEs in Abia State.

Ho₁: Digital transformation has no positive and significant effect on digital dynamic capabilities among agricultural SMEs in Abia State.

Correlations	GenAI Adoption	Employee Skills
Digital transformation	1.000	.684**
digital dynamic capabilities	.684**	1.000
N	149	149

The Spearman result ($\rho = 0.684$, $p < 0.01$) shows a strong, positive, and statistically significant relationship between employee digital transformation and digital dynamic capabilities. This implies that the agricultural sectors that have higher digitally competent personnel have a much better chance of leveraging digital dynamic capabilities. Once employees are informed about the mechanisms of working with new technologies, how to resolve issues, and how to incorporate AI-assisted activities into the daily routine, it will lower the risk of technical malfunctions. The null hypothesis is consequently dismissed.

Ho: Digital dynamic capabilities have a significant effect on entrepreneurial marketing practices among agricultural SMEs in Abia State.

Ho₁: Digital dynamic capabilities have no significant effect on entrepreneurial marketing practices among agricultural SMEs in Abia State.

Correlations	GenAI Adoption	Competitive Pressure
Digital dynamic capabilities	1.000	.531**
entrepreneurial marketing	.531**	1.000
N	149	149

The correlation between Digital dynamic capabilities and entrepreneurial marketing ($\rho = 0.531$, $p < 0.01$) reflects a moderate but significant positive relationship. This implies that the more competition grows in the business of an agricultural entrepreneur, the more firms are encouraged to implement digital tools in a bid to establish a competitive advantage or escape the risk of becoming a victim. A changing business environment is one of the external forces that compel SMEs to modernize their operations, enhance customer experiences, and innovate more quickly.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

Summary of Findings

The research determined the impact of digital transformation (DT) on entrepreneurial marketing (EM) activities on agricultural SMEs in Abia State and the influence of digital dynamic capabilities (DDC) as a mediator. The results provide significant information on the roles of digital integration, skills, and capabilities in marketing innovation and competitiveness within the agricultural industry.

The positive relationship between DT and EM practices is strong ($r = 0.721$, $p < 0.01$), showing that the relationship between the two is a strong positive relation and is statistically significant. This implies that the more digital applications are introduced to the agricultural SMEs, including mobile apps, social media marketing, and digital payment systems, the bolder they can be in seeking market opportunities, reaching out to the customers, and developing product strategies. The outcome validates the fact that digital adoption within efficient entrepreneurial orientation and market dynamics responsiveness.

Online revolution and online dynamic capabilities:

The result of the correlation ($r = 0.684$, $p < 0.01$) indicates the existence of a strong and positive correlation between DT and DDC. This implies that SMEs that invest in digital initiatives are more likely to have a larger opportunity sensing capacity, the ability to exploit the benefits of digital markets, and the ability to restructure the internal processes to embrace the change. The discovery means that digital innovation should not only be associated with the acquisition of technology, but also the ability to develop skills and routines that will enable firms to strategically use those tools.

Digital entrepreneurial marketing and digital dynamic capabilities:

The correlation between DDC and EM ($r = 0.531, p < 0.01$) is not very high, but it does not nullify the hypothesis that a firm with better digital capabilities has more effective marketing behaviours. Customer Agricultural SMEs that can sense and respond quickly to digital opportunities are more likely, innovative and competitive. This supports the theoretical stance that capabilities serve as the mediator between efforts of digital transformation and marketing success.

In sum, the results indicate a definite direction, Digital Transformation - Digital Dynamic Capabilities - Entrepreneurial Marketing, and that the latter is an intermediate mechanism by which digital transformation allows for increasing the level of marketing innovativeness and market activity among agribusiness SMEs in Abia State.

CONCLUSION

The study findings highlight the revolution that digital technologies can have on the agricultural businesses of small and medium in the emerging economies. Digital transformation enhances entrepreneurial marketing and digital dynamic capabilities to a great degree, which demonstrates that the introduction of technology leads to enterprise agility, innovation, and customer-focused innovation. Companies that can establish powerful digital habits, including sense-making opportunities and process reconfiguration, are in a better position to compete and succeed in unstable markets.

The results support the Dynamic Capabilities Theory and confirm that the conventional marketing advantage lies not in the mere fact of having technology but in the capacity to keep on adapting, integrating, and reconstructing the digital resources every time. The research also contributes to the Resource-Based View (RBV) by demonstrating that digital resources and employee competence were precious and scarce resources that led to the success of an entrepreneurship.

In practice, the research emphasizes that to fully capitalize on the potential of change, agricultural SMEs should invest in digital skills and infrastructure and data-driven marketing tools. The policymakers are encouraged to assist such companies by providing capacity-building programs, better rural broadband connectivity, and policies that are friendly to innovations and boost digital entrepreneurship.

Conclusively, the digital transformation is not only a technological change but a strategic facilitator of the entrepreneurial marketing performance. It increases customer interactions and market penetration, as well as innovation, when in harmony with firm-specific dynamic capabilities, which ease the agricultural SMEs into long-term competitiveness and economic sustainability in Abia State.

THEORETICAL IMPLICATION

The findings build and develop the Dynamic Capabilities Theory by demonstrating the strong interconnection between digital transformation, digital dynamic capabilities, and marketing entrepreneurship in agricultural SMEs, and the fact that capabilities do serve as the gateway to the digital investment converting to marketing performance in rural Abia State. The close relationships between digital transformation, digital dynamic capabilities, and entrepreneurial marketing show that the sensing, seizing, and reconfiguring routines are not seen as peripheral add-ons but rather the core processes that can define whether digital instruments increase marketing results in the form of customer involvement, innovation, and market expansion.

The paper is a continuation of the Resource-Based View because it shows that the main focus of transforming the digital technologies into competitive advantage in agricultural markets is firm-specific resources, specifically, digital skills, learning routines, and marketing know-how. The fact that digital dynamic capabilities have a meaningful effect on entrepreneurial marketing practices suggests that internal human and organizational resources may act as strategic assets, as opposed to background conditions, and that such intangible resources underlie the reason why some digitally active agricultural SMEs have greater marketing performance as compared to others that operate in the same environmental constraints.

The results add to the Technology-Organization-Environment viewpoint since they demonstrate that technological preparedness (accessibility and utilization of digital tools), organizational preparedness (competencies, structures, and culture), and environmental factors (rural infrastructure, institutions, and market pressures) collaborate to determine the extent the digital transformation is efficient in supporting entrepreneurial marketing. These dramatic routes between digital transformation and digital dynamic capabilities, and further to entrepreneurial marketing, underscore the notion that organizational capabilities should be considered as an important dimension in elucidating digital adoption and marketing innovation, in particular in low-resource and rural agricultural environments.

The research contributes to the Entrepreneurial Marketing theory by locating the opportunity recognition, innovativeness, proactiveness, and customer intensity in a digitally facilitated rural agricultural environment. The empirical evidence that digital transformation mediated through digital dynamic capabilities improves entrepreneurial marketing behavior indicates that EM in agribusiness is being increasingly mediated by digital infrastructures and learning processes and that digital transformation needs to be viewed not as a technological change but as a driver of more opportunity-seeking, customer-oriented, and innovation-oriented marketing in new economies.

PRACTICAL RECOMMENDATIONS

The owners of Agricultural SMEs ought to invest in ongoing digital training and capacity-building programmes that enhance the capability of employees to use digital tools in sensing market opportunities, connecting with customers online, and reconfiguring processes, such as training employees to use social media marketing, mobile payment systems, and digital records maintenance.

The targeted support programs should be designed by government agencies, agricultural extension services, and business associations that entail the enhancement of infrastructure (e.g., enhanced connectivity in rural areas) with capacity-building workshops on digital transformation, digital dynamic capabilities, and entrepreneurial marketing so that the rural agribusinesses can practically apply the digital tools to enhance their performance in the market.

Agricultural SMEs must eagerly compare with other similar ones, join cooperatives, clusters, as well as digital platforms, whereby they can exchange experiences, discover new digital tools, and develop innovative marketing strategies jointly, thus transitioning to proactive digital transformation, rather than reactive digital adoption of marketing activities.

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