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PERSONAL SELLING AND PROFITABILITY: A STUDY OF JUICE MANUFACTURING COMPANIES IN LAGOS STATE, NIGERIA

Ulumeh Isaac Sambo[1]; Samuel Agbokhaode Okenyi[2]
[1]*Babcock University, Illishan- Remo, Ogun State, Nigeria.*
[2]*Auchi polytechnic, Auchi, Edo State, Nigeria.*
Emails: ulumehsamboisaac@gmail.com; samokenyi@gmail.com

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Abstract
Profitability is a critical measure of a company's success, influenced by various internal and external factors. In today's competitive business landscape, businesses constantly strive to differentiate themselves and gain market share. The effectiveness of a company's marketing strategies can significantly impact its ability to attract and retain customers, ultimately affecting its profitability. Therefore, there is a need to investigate how personal selling practices can positively influence the profitability of selected juice manufacturing companies in Lagos State, Nigeria. By focusing on personalized sales techniques and effective customer relationship management, these companies can improve their sales performance, strengthen customer loyalty, and ultimately enhance their profitability in the highly competitive market. The study employed a survey research design to investigate the effect of personal selling on the profitability of selected juice manufacturing companies in Lagos State, Nigeria. The population consisted of 2,769 employees from these companies. Using the Research Advisor's table, a sample size of 433 employees was determined. Data were collected through a structured and validated questionnaire, with a response rate of 88.2%. The reliability coefficients, measured by Cronbach's alpha, ranged from 0.791 to 0.98, indicating high internal consistency. Data analysis involved descriptive and inferential statistics. The study findings are stated thus, Personal selling have a significant effect on profitability ($R = 0.525$, $R^2 = 0.276$; $t = 12.030$, $\beta = 0.458 > 0.05$), of juice manufacturing companies in Lagos State, Nigeria. The study recommended companies to continuously monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of their marketing strategies which involves tracking key performance indicators such as sales growth, market share, competitive advantage and profitability to assess the impact of advertising, sales promotion, personal selling, direct marketing, and overall marketing communication efforts. By regularly reviewing and adjusting their marketing strategies based on performance insights, companies can adapt to changing market dynamics and maintain a competitive edge in the industry.

Key Words: *Advertising, Competitive advantage, Direct marketing, Firm performance, Marketing communications, Profitability.*

Introduction
In the juice manufacturing industry in Lagos State, Nigeria, the relationship between personal selling strategies and profitability is a critical area of concern. While personal selling plays a vital role in driving sales and revenue for juice manufacturing companies,

the industry faces various challenges that impact profitability. Issues such as intense competition, fluctuating consumer preferences, distribution challenges, and the high cost of production significantly affect the profitability of juice manufacturing companies in Lagos State. Therefore, understanding how personal selling strategies can address these profitability issues is crucial for the sustained success of juice manufacturers in the region. The COVID-19 pandemic has persisted for over three years, profoundly impacting the economy, businesses, and the lives of residents. While existing literature predominantly focuses on strategies for survival during this crisis, there is a notable lack of research on industries and organizations that have thrived amidst the turmoil (Plouf, 2020). These few industries that have experienced significant market opportunities during the pandemic not only face a substantial increase in market demand but also operate within an environment where most sectors of society are grappling with recession and distress (Zhang et al., 2023).

Improving profitability has over the years been a thing of concern to marketing practitioners due to the difficulty of precisely quantifying the impact of personal selling and sales promotional strategies on sales return (Ekanem, 2021). In any organization, whether manufacturing or service industry, profit or non-profit oriented, the main purpose of its establishment is to achieve certain goals and objectives of the organization (Ifenlourchukwu et al., 2022). Though, many firms do not have the necessary finance and marketing knowledge, tools, resources and skills to sustain and grow their businesses (Rambe, 2017; Madichie et al., 2019; Salam et al., 2021). Despite the immense contributions of personal selling to different business organizations, critics still fail to recognize it as a marketing strategy to reckon with. They tend to lay many emphases on variables such as advertising, publicity and sales promotion. Therefore, there is need for research to delve into developing metrics that measure the impact of personal selling activities on profitability, providing a clearer understanding of the return on investment in personal selling efforts (Green, 2019; Dixon & Tanner, 2018). With the advent of digital technologies, the landscape of personal selling is undergoing significant changes.

The integration of online platforms, social media, and digital communication tools into personal selling strategies has the potential to reshape customer interactions. However, there is a research gap in understanding how firms can effectively adapt their personal selling approaches to enhance profitability (Plouffe, 2020; Verhoef, 2017). To achieve the study objective, a hypothesis was formulated:

H_0: personal selling does not have significant effect on profitability of selected juice manufacturing firms in Lagos State, Nigeria.

Conceptual Review

Profitability

Fitra and Ashry (2019) define profitability as the company's ability to generate profits in relation to its sales, total capital, and assets. It is a critical indicator of a company's long-term viability and reflects its future prospects. Return on equity (ROE) measures the company's ability to generate net income from shareholder equity, with a higher ROE indicating greater efficiency in utilizing capital to generate profits. Profitability, as highlighted by Mola and Rahaman (2021), is a key financial metric that assesses a

company's ability to generate earnings relative to its expenses and investments. It is crucial for evaluating a business's financial health and overall success. Kamande and Maina (2019) emphasize that profitability is often evaluated through various financial ratios and metrics, providing insights into a company's operational efficiency and potential for long-term sustainability. Yanti and Darmayanti (2019) note that profitability significantly impacts a company's value, leading to a positive response from investors and potentially driving up stock prices. This, in turn, enhances the company's value in the eyes of investors. To improve and maintain company performance, Andawastya (2017) suggests measuring the influence of the capital structure on profitability and liquidity. Capital structure is critical for profitability because the right mix of debt and equity can enhance a company's profitability, as indicated by Habib et al. (2016). Mola and Rahaman (2021) further stress that profitability is a reflection of how effectively a company can generate profits from its operational processes, ensuring its long-term sustainability. Higher profitability increases creditors' and investors' confidence, leading to increased access to loans and investments, as indicated by Manoppo and Arie (2016). Moreover, Awosemusi and Awofadeju (2023) and Suwardika (2017) suggest that increased profitability not only indicates efficient management of operational funds but also attracts investors seeking higher returns. Consequently, a company's value increases with higher profitability.

Personal Selling

Personal selling is the personal presentation by the firm's sales force for the purpose of making sales and building customer relationship (Kotler & Armstrong, 2013). According to Ingram et al. (2020) personal selling is a form of person-to-person communication in which a salesperson works with prospective buyers in attempting to determine their purchase needs to provide a match with the company's products or services. It can also be concluded that personal selling is a salesperson who makes verbal presentations with one or more prospective buyers to sell products to certain targeted locations or stores (Khalid 2022).

Personal selling involves the two-way flow of communication between a consumer and vendor recurrently in face-to-face meeting planned to affect a person's or group's purchasing choice. However, with developments in technology, personal selling also takes place over the telephone, through video conferencing and communicating computer links between buyer and selling though personal selling remains a highly human intensive activity despite the use of technology. Ekanem (2021) also noted that personal selling serves three foremost roles in a firm's complete marketing effort. Salesmen are the serious link between the firm and its customers; salesmen are the firm in a customer's eyes. They signify what a company is or tries to be and are frequently the only personal contact a customer has with the company; and lastly, personal selling may play a main role in a firm's marketing package. personal selling is a unique element of marketing communication (Wijaya et al., 2021). Unlike advertising and sales promotion which main focus are to create awareness about the existence of a product or services and provide information as to the features of the products, its availability and price on a mass basis, personal selling is an individualistic approach that is designed to meet specific need of prospects (Abiazem & Bako, 2019). It is usually directed to specific market segments. It

goes beyond the fundamental role of marketing communication, it plays significant role in the entire exchange process (Yang et al., 2020). A good demonstration by a salesperson often results in sales decisions by customers. The salespersons are the ones who can gain customers' attention and present the products describing or explaining its attributes to the customer. The products sometimes require salesperson demonstration to the buyers in order to generate interest and convince the buyer to buy the product (Adewale et al., 2019; Joshua, 2022).

Theoretical Framework

Theory of Reasoned Action

The Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA) suggests that an individual's behavior is influenced by their intention to perform that behavior, which is shaped by their attitude toward the behavior and subjective norms. In the context of personal selling and profitability in juice manufacturing companies in Lagos State, TRA indicates that profitability can be enhanced through effective personal selling strategies. The profitability of these companies is influenced by employees' attitudes toward personal selling and the perceived social pressure to use these strategies effectively. By implementing effective personal selling techniques, juice manufacturing companies can positively influence their employees' attitudes, increase sales, and enhance customer satisfaction, ultimately leading to improved profitability.

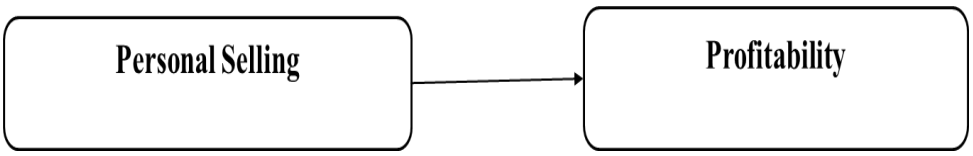


Figure 1: Conceptual Model

Empirical Review

Erasmus and Ana (2021) discovered a significant positive relationship between personal selling strategies and customer relationships, alongside a positive correlation with firm profitability. Similarly, Supriyanto and Ariyanti (2018) found that sales training and personal selling exerted a significant influence on profitability, both individually and collectively. Adegbite et al. (2019) justified the link between personal selling and organizational sales volume, emphasizing its impact on profitability. Iwunze (2018) emphasized the importance of careful recruitment and selection of sales personnel, suggesting that adequately trained individuals, who are physically, technically, socially, and intellectually proficient, can significantly contribute to achieving organizational goals.

Azeez and Beyratna (2020) highlighted the positive impact of salespersons' personal characteristics, store ambiance, and promotional activities on customer buying behavior in clothing stores. However, the presentation of goods by salespersons was found to have no significant impact on buying behavior. Furthermore, Bankole et al. (2021) revealed that personal selling significantly affects both sales efficiency and customer relationships.

Similarly, Sitorus and Syahla (2022) concluded that price perception and personal selling have a simultaneous and partial positive effect on car purchase decisions. Finally, Zhang and Zhang (2020) highlighted that research and development contribute positively to high growth, whereas advertising is more beneficial for slow-growth peers.

Materials and Methods

This study utilized a survey research design to investigate the relationship between personal selling strategies and profitability in selected juice manufacturing companies in Lagos, Nigeria. The population comprised 2,769 employees from the marketing and sales departments of these companies. Employing the Research Advisor's table, the sample size for employees was determined to be 433, with a 30% non-response rate considered. Proportionate sampling was used to distribute questionnaires to ensure unbiased representation. Data were collected using an adapted and validated questionnaire. Reliability coefficients for the constructs, assessed using Cronbach's Alpha, ranged from 0.726 to 0.763, while Composite Reliability ranged from 0.760 to 0.802. The response rate for the questionnaire was 88.2%.

Results and Discussion

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics for Personal Selling.

Items	**= 382** **Level of agreement**								
	VH	**H**	**MH**	**ML**	**L**	**VL**	**Missing**	**Mean**	**Std Deviation**
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%		
Customer Feedback	80.1	13.6	6.0	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.3	5.73	0.3
Average Transaction Value	57.3	40.3	2.1	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.3	5.54	0.3
Product Knowledge	54.7	36.1	8.9	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.3	5.45	0.3
Self-Motivation and Resilience	48.4	43.5	7.9	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.3	5.39	0.3
Communication and Interpersonal skills	45.0	38.7	15.4	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.8	5.26	0.8
Average								**5.47**	**0.70**

Table 1 presents the descriptive statistics on personal selling. According to the table above, a total of 80.1% of the respondents indicated very high with regards to customer feedback, 13.6% indicated high and 6.0% of the respondents indicated moderately high

and 0.3% did not respond. On average, the respondents indicated that customer feedback is very high with a standard deviation showing convergence to the mean (mean = 5.45, STD = 0.3). Additionally, the results showed that with regards to product knowledge, 54.7% of the respondents rated very high, 36.1% indicated high and 8.9% indicated moderately high while 0.3% did not respond. On average, the respondents indicated that average transactional value is high with standard deviation showing convergence to the mean (mean = 5.54, STD = 0.3). The table also revealed that with regards to product knowledge, 54.7% of the respondents rated very high, 36.1% indicated high and 8.9% indicated moderately high and 0.3% did not respond. On average, the respondents indicated that product knowledge is high with standard deviation showing convergence to the mean (mean = 5.45, STD = 0.3). Furthermore, the results showed that with regards to self-motivation and resilience, 48.4% of the respondents rated very high, 43.5% indicated high and 7,9% indicated moderately high and 0.3% did not respond. On average, the respondents indicated that self-motivation and resilience is high with standard deviation showing convergence to the mean (mean = 5.39, STD = 0.3). Finally, Communication and Interpersonal skills, 45.0% of the respondents indicated very high, 38.7% indicated high, 15.4% indicated moderately high, and 0.8% did not provide an answer. On average, the respondents indicated that the conversion rate is high with the standard deviation showing divergence from the mean (mean = 5.26, STD = 0.8). The average mean of the items on personal selling is 5.47 with a standard deviation of 0.70 showing divergence from the mean. This means that on average the respondents indicated that personal selling is high with regards to marketing communication.

Table 2: Descriptive Statistics for Profitability.

Items	= 382 Level of Agreement								
	VH	**H**	**MH**	**ML**	**L**	**VL**	**Missing**	**Mean**	**Std Deviation**
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%		
Overall Financial Health	77.5	20.9	1.6	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	5.76	0.46
Profit Sharing and Bonuses	46.6	50.0	3.4	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	5.43	0.56
Sales Growth	53.4	31.9	14.7	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	5.39	0.73
Revenue Growth	44.2	45.0	10.7	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	5.34	0.66
Investment and Growth Opportunities	51.3	36.6	12.0	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	5.39	0.69
Average								**5.46**	**0.62**

According to Table 2 above, with regards to overall financial health, a total of 77.5% of the respondents indicated very high sales team performance, 20.9% indicated high and

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1.6% of the respondents indicated moderately high. On average, the respondents indicated that overall financial health is very high with a standard deviation showing convergence to the mean (mean = 5.76, STD = 0.46). Additionally, the results showed that with regard to profit sharing and bonuses, 46.6% of the respondents rated very high, 50.0% indicated high and 3.4% indicated moderately high. On average, the respondents indicated that profit sharing and bonuses is high with standard deviation showing convergence to the mean (mean = 5.43, STD = 0.56). The results showed that with regards to sales growth, 53.4% of the respondents rated very high, 31.9% indicated high, and 14.7% indicated moderately high. On average, the respondents indicated that sales growth is high with standard deviation showing convergence to the mean (mean = 5.39, STD = 0.73). The table also revealed that with regards to revenue growth, 44.2% of the respondents rated very high, 45.0% indicated high and 10.7% indicated moderately high. On average, the respondents indicated that revenue growth is high with standard deviation showing convergence to the mean (mean = 5.33, STD = 0.66). Finally, regarding Investment and growth opportunities, 51.3% of the respondents indicated very high, 36.6% indicated high, while 12.0% indicated moderately high. On average, the respondents indicated that Investment and growth opportunities is high with standard deviation showing convergence to the mean (mean = 5.39, STD = 0.69). The average mean of the items on profitability is 5.46 with a standard deviation of 0.62 showing convergence to the mean. This means that on average the respondents indicated that sales promotion is moderately high with regards to profitability.

Relating tables 1 to 2, shows that there is the same pattern of responses from the respondents. As a result, we can deduce that personal selling is likely to affect the profitability of juice manufacturing companies in Lagos State, Nigeria.

Test of Hypothesis

H_0: Personal selling has no significant effect on profitability of juice manufacturing companies in Lagos state, Nigeria.

Table 3: Regression analysis

Model Three $Y = \beta_0 + \beta_1 x_1 + e_i$		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	*t*	Sig.
		B	**SD. Error**	**Beta**		
N	(Constant)	2.954	.209		14.127	.000
382	Personal selling	.458	.038	.525	12.030	.000

Dependent Variable: Profitability

$R = .525$, $R^2 = .276$, $t = 12.030$, $p = 0.000 < 0.05$

Table 3 shows the regression analysis of the effect of personal selling on profitability of juice manufacturing companies in Lagos State, Nigeria. The results showed that personal selling has a positive significant effect on the profitability of juice manufacturing companies in Lagos State, Nigeria ($\beta = 0.458$, $t = 12.030$, $p < 0.05$). The R-value for the

regression model is 0.525 which shows that advertising has a moderate positive relationship with sales growth. In addition, the R square value for the regression model is 0.276 meaning 27.6% variations in profitability were caused by personal selling. The standard error (SD Error = 0.025) measures the adequacy of the model. This means that the variability in the prediction is 0.025. The model is adequate as the S.E ≤ 2.5. The regression model used to explain the variation in profitability due to the effect of personal selling can be stated as follows:

PR = 2.954 + 0.209PS……Eqn 1.
Where: PR = Profitability
PS = Personal Selling

The regression equation above shows that the parameter estimate of personal selling complies with *a priori* expectation which states that personal selling will have a positive effect on sales growth. The constant was 2.954, which implies that if personal selling is at zero; the value of profitability would be positive. This implies that if employees believe that there is no personal selling in their workplace, a level of profitability can still be experienced. The coefficient of personal selling was 0.209 indicating that one unit change in advertising results in 0.209 increase in profitability of juice manufacturing companies in Lagos State, Nigeria. This implies that an increase in sales promotion will subsequently increase the sales growth of juice manufacturing companies in Lagos State, Nigeria. Table 3 also shows the t value is 12.030 at $p<0.05$ which suggests that personal selling significantly explained variations in profitability. Based on the results, the null hypothesis three (H_0) which states that personal selling has no significant effect on profitability, was rejected.

Discussion of findings

The results of this study add to the body of knowledge that support the positive effect of personal selling on profitability. The result of this study aligns with several studies such as; Erasmus and Ana (2021) who showed that sales training and personal selling partially and simultaneously have a significant influence on profitability. A stronger alignment to this current study is that of Adegbite et al. (2019) who justified that there is a relationship between personal selling and organizational sales and personal selling has an influence on profitability. Similarly, Sitorus and Syahla (2022) study's conclusion shows that price perception and personal selling simultaneously and partially have a positive and significant effect on car purchase decisions, which translates to more profitability for the car manufacturers. Others studies that aligned with this study are that of Bankole et al. (2021), Iwunze (2018) and Zhang and Zhang (2020).

Conclusion and Recommendation

Based on the findings of this study, it is evident that personal selling significantly affects the profitability of juice manufacturing companies in Lagos state, Nigeria. The results demonstrate the importance of personal selling strategies in enhancing the financial performance of these companies. By effectively implementing personal selling techniques, juice manufacturing companies can improve their sales performance, strengthen customer relationships, and ultimately increase profitability. Moving forward,

it is recommended that juice manufacturing companies in Lagos state, Nigeria, prioritize the training and development of their sales personnel to enhance their personal selling skills. Additionally, companies should invest in technologies that support personalized customer interactions, such as customer relationship management (CRM) systems, to improve the effectiveness of their personal selling efforts. Furthermore, companies should continuously monitor and evaluate the performance of their personal selling strategies to identify areas for improvement and optimization. For future research, it is suggested that studies explore the impact of specific personal selling techniques, such as relationship selling or consultative selling, on the profitability of juice manufacturing companies. Additionally, research could investigate the moderating effects of factors such as company size, market segment, and competitive environment on the relationship between personal selling and profitability. Moreover, longitudinal studies could be conducted to assess the long-term impact of personal selling strategies on the financial performance and sustainability of juice manufacturing companies in Lagos state, Nigeria.

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