

Customer Relationship Management and Survival of Manufacturing Small and Medium Enterprises in Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

Many firms, especially manufacturing small and medium enterprises (SMEs), have ignored the need for good customer relationship management (CRM), which has caused many customer losses. This study examines the effect of CRM on the survival of manufacturing SMEs in Anambra State, Nigeria. This quantitative study adopted a positivistic paradigm and a survey research method. The population of the study was the owner and managers of manufacturing SMEs in Anambra State, Nigeria. A structured questionnaire was adopted for data collected from owners and managers of manufacturing SMEs. Multiple Regression Analysis (MRA) and other statistics were used to analyse the data. The study found that customer orientation has a more significant and positive effect on the survival of manufacturing SMEs, followed by service quality and customer service. At the same time, complaint handling significantly and negatively affects manufacturing SMEs' survival. The study concluded that CRM significantly affects the survival of manufacturing SMEs in Anambra State, Nigeria. The paper recommends, amongst others, that SMEs should acknowledge customer orientation as an effective strategy in ensuring companies keep abreast of customer needs to satisfy them and ensure survival effectively.

Keywords: Customer Relationship Management, Survival, Manufacturing SME, Customer Orientation, Customer Service, Service Quality, Complaint Handling.

1. INTRODUCTION

Small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) need to implement a solid information technology solution that supports their customer database, production, sales, and marketing management to build trusting working relationships with their clients. Customer Relation Management (CRM) is one of the information technology applications that SMEs may use. According to Sin & Tse (2015), An organisation can find, attract, retain, and develop profitable customers using the comprehensive strategy and process known as CRM. The methodical approach of CRM optimises communications with all clients and the wider environment. According to Krishnamoorthy et al. (2016), the acquisition, management, and regain of management activities are covered to maximise the value of the relationship portfolio at the initiation stage, maintenance stage, and termination stage.

CRM is both a new method of doing business and a piece of technology. CRM is a business strategy, process, culture, and technology that, according to Ndubisi et al. (2016), enables organisations to maximise revenue and increase value by understanding and meeting each customer's unique needs. According to Ndubisi and Nwankwo (2012), CRM takes the form of customer-focused services, knowledge management, knowledge creation, customer touch points, information and communications technology, timely service delivery, friendly staff, competitive prices for usefulness, and ease of adopting policies. Alhakimi & Ghaleb (2019) concluded that CRM is the process of gathering and analysing information about a company's interactions with customers to increase those customers' value to the company. CRM aids businesses in keeping customers and fostering positive relationships with them to win their loyalty and long-term commitment, build sustainable competitive advantage, enhance customer relations, and improve employee performance, employee satisfaction, productivity, profitability, and goal attainment (Okeke, 2017). CRM,

however, is a crucial idea that shouldn't be disregarded in either theory or practise. In this study, CRM was defined as the organization's integration of marketing, sales, customer service, and supply-chain functions to boost effectiveness and efficiency in delivering value to the customer.

SMEs are organisations with total capital expenditures (excluding land) of between N2 million and N5 million, according to the Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN). A SME is also defined by the SMIEIS as any industry with a maximum asset base of N200 million, excluding working capital and land, and no fewer than ten nor more than 300 employees employed by businesses (Imoughele, 2014). Nwankwo and Kanyangale (2020) argued that because they aid in fostering a nation's economic growth, SMEs serve as a breeding ground for innovations, inventions, and employment. Gwadabe & Amirah (2017) added that SMEs' significance was primarily driven by their characteristics. As a result, their growth is typically viewed as a realistic option for the sustainable development of any given economy. The academics also argued that the growth of SMEs will be a useful tool for promoting the development and expansion of Nigeria's economy because they will create jobs, foster entrepreneurship and management skills, prevent a small amount of rural-urban migration, advance technology, develop a number of related industries, and increase income equality. For the purposes of the study, a small, informal business, or SME, is one with few employees, little capital, and a number of bases that operates at the micro level of the economy.

CRM enhances SMEs' capacity to carry out these tasks, which are significant sources of competitive advantage for most SMEs (Ovat, 2016). To improve customer satisfaction and gain a competitive advantage, SMEs frequently use CRM, which many small businesses have identified as the secret to their success (Opafunso & Adepoju, 2014). SMEs are more familiar with local knowledge and are closer to their customers. As a result, it is simpler for them to gather important data, such as customer preferences and perceptions of the company's goods and services. Additionally, according to AlQershi et al. (2019), SMEs are more adaptable and innovative. As a result, it makes businesses more receptive to customer needs, which enhances their capacity to provide better customer service.

To add value for chosen customers and achieve short- and long-term goals, CRM integrates internal activities and external networks as a marketing strategy (Gallego-Gomez et al., 2021). According to this explanation, the CRM concept aids SMEs in retaining current customers, attracting new ones, fostering customer confidence, and informing customers about a variety of goods and services to help them increase profits or avoid losses. This is intended to be supported by AlQershi et al (2019) claim that CRM is an effective marketing tool for connecting with and retaining current customers. Similar to this, Fiiwe et al. (2023) also confirmed that CRM helps businesses find more profitable ways to keep their current customers as opposed to finding new ones. In a different study, Domazet & Neogradi (2023). argued that many companies view CRM systems as a marketing tool to help them give current customers more value and boost customer satisfaction in order to ensure their long-term survival.

All over the world, academics, researchers, and economists have acknowledged the critical roles that small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) play in promoting sustainable economic growth. Due to their contributions to innovation and job creation in both developed and developing nations, SMEs are a major force in modern economies. Due to developing international markets, Nigeria's SME sector has drastically decreased. According to Ocloo et al. (2014), most African SMEs, particularly those in Nigeria, have reached the declining stage because of increased competitive pressure and quick technological advancements, while those that have survived are ailing and sick. To demonstrate that customers have more supplier options, Effiom& Edet (2018) claim that globalisation increases the likelihood that both large and small businesses will offer low-cost substitute products. The study claims that Nigerian SMEs have a weak foundation, making it challenging for them to compete favourably with their foreign counterparts (Gwadabe & Amirah, 2017). Furthermore, Nwankwo and Kanyangale (2022) confirmed that Nigeria's underutilised production capacity, industrial backwardness, and SME closures were all results of the global markets.

Both large and small businesses must concentrate on the customer if they want to survive in the global market. CRM can help SMEs establish productive relationships with their clients. SMEs typically strive to excel, target a specific market niche, and develop closer relationships with the clients in this market. Here, CRM is a crucial tool for SMEs. Amir et al. (2015) identified specific characteristics of SMEs that impede the effective use of CRM tools, such as a lack of business and information technology (IT) strategy,

constrained access to capital resources, a preference for using technology and information systems to automate rather than inform, the influence of significant clients, and limited information skills.

Furthermore, both advanced and developing economies have conducted numerous studies on CRM. While small and medium-sized businesses have not been extensively studied, especially in Anambra State, the majority of studies have concentrated on large organisations. This study aims to investigate the impact of CRM on the survival of manufacturing SMEs in Anambra State based on previous studies. Customer orientation, customer service, service quality, and compliant handling make up the main CRM construct.

The results of this study will be helpful from a theoretical and practical standpoint. The study will theoretically serve as the foundation for analysing how CRM and SMEs' survival are related. This study will broaden our understanding of CRM and SMEs, especially in the context of Nigeria. The study will be extremely valuable to academics and SME policymakers/formulators practically speaking. The results of this study will aid the major players in SMEs in understanding how CRM will affect their ability to survive. The conclusions will aid SMEs in making well-informed decisions about enhancing their survival strategies through efforts at customer relationship management. The findings of the study will help SMEs' management better satisfy their customers and meet their needs quickly and effectively. The study, therefore, hypothesised that:

H₀: CRM has no significant effect on the survival of manufacturing SMEs in Anambra State.

2. REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

2.1 customer relationship management (crm)

CRM is a crucial business tactic. Colin, opined that the term "CRM" first appeared in the middle of the 1990s. According to Foya (2015), CRM is a thorough approach for luring in, keeping, and working with customers to produce superior value for the client and the company. The functions of marketing, sales, customer service, and supply-chain management can all be integrated to improve how well an organisation provides value to its clients. Foya (2015), CRM is a comprehensive strategy that unifies people, processes, and technology to allow for seamless integration of all business functions that serve the customer, including marketing, sales, customer services, and field support.

According to Lukmanul, Nanis, and Ujianto (2017), CRM is a methodology based on modern information technology that aids businesses in achieving their long-term objectives of enhancing customer satisfaction. Soltani et al. (2018) assert that CRM is an enterprise strategy that enhances customer attraction, retention, loyalty, and, ultimately, customer profitability by comprehending and influencing customer behaviour through efficient interactions. Ndubisi and Nwankwo 2012 define CRM as a core business strategy that combines internal operations, external networks, and target customers' needs to produce and deliver value to them profitably. This strategy is dependent on information technology-enabled high-quality customer-related data. Similar to Kotler & Armstrong (2018), who defined CRM as the total data management activities and the establishment and maintenance of profitable customer relationships through the provision of superior customer value and satisfaction, this definition focuses on the management of customer relationships. CRM is a procedure that, in accordance with Fozia, Shiamwama, and Otiso (2014), enables businesses to provide excellent real-time customer service by developing relationships with each valued customer by intelligently utilising account information.

However, CRM does involve IT-enabled business processes that identify, develop, integrate, and focus a company's competencies on building valuable long-term relationships that deliver superior customer value (Alemu & Zewdu, 2018). CRM is not solely based on IT. Businesses can easily identify their most valuable customers with the aid of specialised products and services, and they can learn more about them (i.e., develop, maintain, and interact) to better meet their needs and expectations (i.e., emotional content, output). CRM thus improves a business's ability to draw in and retain customers while encouraging loyalty, which is a crucial competitive advantage (Dekimpe et al., 1997). As the relationship develops, both the customer and the business benefit. CRM practises are the actions taken by a business to keep its current customers and draw in new ones by offering unique touches that cater to and satisfy their needs. Some of

these techniques include customer segmentation, database marketing, personalization and one-to-one marketing, proactive selling, cross-selling, loyalty programmes, and client referrals.

According to this study, customer relationship management (CRM) is the careful management of client contact points to draw in and keep customers. CRM organises comprehensive information about customers using sophisticated software and analytical tools.

2.2 Customer Orientation

Employees who practise customer orientation place a strong emphasis on assisting customers in achieving their long-term goals. Here, management and employees work together to achieve both individual and group objectives to maintain and retain customers (Ndubisi et al., 2016). According to Hakala (2011), "customer orientation" is a sales philosophy that asserts that an organisation's top priority is to satisfy the needs and expectations of its customers. It deals with the fluid relationships among customers, the organisation, rivals, and stakeholders. It includes the ongoing improvement of corporate procedures. In management economics, the customer is king. Lack of customer orientation may reduce conversions. Organisational structure, culture, and business processes all contribute to a lack of customer orientation.

It is critical to establish up front that the primary objective of customer-focused behaviours is to increase long-term customer satisfaction and promote customer loyalty. According to Ndubisi et al. (2016), a successful CRM implementation required a strong focus on the customer. Furthermore, current research has shown that SMEs need to have a better understanding of customer orientation because it increases their viability. Organisations that use CRM can be described as "customer-driven" in that all of their decisions must take the interests and welfare of their customers into account. Businesses should promise to deliver superior value to customers and strive to outperform their rivals in terms of effectiveness and efficiency in achieving the desired satisfaction. With this strategy, an effort is made to tailor the offer to the company's most important clients. The core elements of this dimension include interactive co-creation marketing, personalization, critical customer lifetime value identification, and customer-centric marketing (Wang, Chi & Yang, 2014).

2.3 Customer service

Serving customers includes helping them before, during, and after a purchase. According to McKinney (2015), "customer service is the act of taking care of the customer's needs by providing and delivering professional, helpful, high-quality service and assistance before, during, and after the customer's needs are satisfied." Modern technology can be used to offer automated self-service or human sales and service representatives can provide customer service. According to Chinunda (2013), customer service is an organization's capacity to meet customers' wants and needs. An organization's capacity to exceed customers' expectations continually and consistently is a key component of providing excellent customer service. The success of any organisation depends on its customers, according to Ndubisi et al. (2016). Thus, a company's need for quality customer service is paramount because when a customer is happy with its goods or services, it can be sure that overall profits will be high. Recurring visits to the same company are the result of positive customer experiences. Customer service is the key differentiator between businesses and their rivals. Good customer service is a necessity for any company to remain in operation.

One of the key strategies used by businesses to retain customers is customer service. It involves promptly engaging with customers through face-to-face meetings, phone calls, mail, faxes, and emails as well as giving feedback, as well as promptly responding to their needs and wants, questions, and complaints. Almost every company has employees and agents who are involved in some aspect of customer service; however, because of the fiercer industry competition, companies are being forced to become more customer-focused through their use of customer relationship management. It costs more to acquire new customers than it does to retain existing ones. For businesses to provide quick, error-free, convenient service and retain customers, they must provide high-quality customer service.

As a result, this study defined customer service as the help and guidance a company offers customers before, during, and after a purchase. Satisfied customers, brand loyalty, and revenue growth are all directly correlated.

2.4 Service Quality

Marketing, which values human interaction between a company and its customers, is where service quality has its roots. It focuses on the connection between customers' expectations for service and how well that service is provided. The term "perceived service quality" was coined by Gronroos in 1982 and describes this relationship (Yu-Je & Peng-Hsiang, 2015). There is no academic agreement on what exactly constitutes service quality, making it difficult to define and quantify. The result is that "many scholars have labelled service quality as a 'elusive' and 'indistinct' concept that is problematic to operationalise and measure" (Rahim, 2016). Let's first define service and quality before exploring what service quality entails. According to Wael, a service is any action or benefit that one party performs for another and that is essentially intangible and does not result in ownership. Services are acts, operations, and accomplishments or actions, according to Siew-Peng and Sedigheh. Because their outputs are not physical products, services encompass all economic activities. A service is an intangible good that is typically produced and used at the same time. Service quality is described in the study as a high-levelled process or outcome in a partially concurrent production and consumption process. According to this definition, offering and receiving services are interdependent activities.

2.5 Compliant handling

A complaint is an expression of annoyance by a client/consumer directed at a service provider during service failure (Ateke et al., 2015). When a customer receives a service that doesn't live up to their expectations, they complain because they are unhappy. According to Keiningham, Frennea, Aksoy, & Mittal (2015), unhappy clients are more likely to file complaints than pleased ones. Contrarily, complaint handling involves the actions and activities of suppliers and their ability to foresee potential complaints, address those that have already surfaced before they become a problem, and openly discuss solutions when problems do occur (Ateke et al., 2015). Salim et al. (2018) maintained that many businesses use complaint-handling strategies to analyse and learn from product and service failures to increase their credibility in the eyes of their customers. To increase customer satisfaction and prevent switching behaviour, an efficient complaint management process must consider both customer expectations and justice dimensions.

In the event of a complaint, a company must have a suitable response. According to Kotler & Armstrong (2018), this method of handling complaints should enable businesses to give customers high-quality responses, address their worries and perceptions, and make plans for future prevention. However, this study defines complaints handling as a planned and controlled way of receiving, recording, processing, responding to, and reporting on protests and using them to improve services and decision-making. Therefore, ignoring customer complaints will inevitably result in poor service delivery by businesses being exposed to the public, the public becoming aware of minor issues, and the making of rash decisions that are frequently inappropriate (Salami & Emueje, 2015). Therefore, how a complaint is handled in a buyer-seller relationship can either lead to positive or negative outcomes.

2.6 survival of small and medium enterprises

An important concept in the study of entrepreneurial activities is the survival of SMEs. Any organization's two main objectives in today's cutthroat business environment are survival and growth. Every company aspires to stand out from the crowd and outperform rivals in order to accomplish goals and dominate their market. Survival is defined as "the act or fact of living or continuing longer than another person or thing" in the Merriam-Webster Business Dictionary. According to Gwadabe & Amirah (2017) research, SMEs that survive for more than five years can be said to have survived the volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous (VUCA) business environment. Few small businesses survive because they are unable to provide the goods and services that the public wants and needs. Some businesses offer excellent goods or services, but no one wants to pay for them, or even worse, pay for goods that won't generate a profit for the business. Studies on the survival of SMEs have revealed that measures of survival of SMEs in various nations differ slightly from one another. For instance, Pasha et al. (2018) contend that the high failure rate of SMEs is a result of lending institutions' reluctance to support these businesses financially.

According to the United States Bureau of Labour Statistics, 50% of US SMEs remain for five years and about one-third survive more than ten years (Pasha et al., 2018).

Similarly, a 1977–1997 study in Cote d'Ivoire discovered that formally registered businesses typically last six years (Klapper & Richmond, 2009). Despite efforts made by the Nigerian government and other support agents, 85% of businesses in Nigeria do not survive past their fifth birthday, according to Gwadabe & Amirah's (2017) research. About 5 to 10% of the population remains alive after the small percentage that lives past the fifth year dies between the sixth and tenth years of its existence (Gwadabe & Amirah, 2017). For other Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) nations, the statistics are comparable. Statistics for emerging and developing nations are less readily available and typically rely on administrative data that only includes formally registered businesses. These firms are in the minority; according to Pacha the majority are unofficial and unregistered. Survey-based research is not replicated frequently enough to understand survival over time. Additionally, a lot of micro and small businesses are people's last resorts or 'survivalist' pursuits for those who are unable to find formal employment. According to the literature, micro and small businesses typically face much greater growth barriers than those in industrialised countries, which negatively impacts their ability to produce and survive.

3. METHODOLOGY

To obtain the opinions of the owners and managers of manufacturing SMEs in Anambra State, Nigeria, this quantitative study used a positivistic paradigm and a survey. The state of Anambra is one of those in southeast Nigeria. Anambra State shares borders with Delta State on the west, Imo and Abia states on the south, Enugu state on the east, and Kogi state on the north. The population for this study consists of the owners and managers of manufacturing SMEs in Anambra State. The total number of manufacturing SMEs in Anambra State is not readily available. The fact that the population of this study is infinite necessitated the use of Cochran's formula to draw up the appropriate sample size for the study. Below is Cochran's formula:

$$n = \frac{Z^2 Pq}{e^2}$$

Valid where:

n = sample size

Z = the value on the Z table at 95% confidence level = 1.96

e = Sampling error at 5%

p = maximum variability of the population at 50%. i.e. (0.5)

q = 1-p = 0.5

Substituting,

$$n = \frac{(1.96)^2 0.5(0.5)}{0.05^2}$$

$$n = 384.116$$

The sample size is approximately 384 manufacturing SMEs in Anambra State. A total of 128 respondents were selected respectively from Onitsha (Anambra North), Nnewi (Anambra South) and Awka (Anambra Central). A standardised questionnaire with a five-point Likert scale was applied to collect the primary data from owners and managers of manufacturing SMEs. The internal consistency score for this study is 0.689, which is within the acceptable threshold in Cronbach alpha. The hypothesis was tested through multiple regression analysis to measure the effect of CRM on the survival of SMEs.

3.1 Data analysis

Owners and managers of manufacturing SMEs in Anambra State received a total of 384 copies of questionnaires, of which 349 were correctly completed and deemed pertinent to the study. A response rate of 90.9% is indicated by this number. But in order to test the formulated hypothesis, preliminary studies like the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) Test, exploratory factor analysis (EFA), and Pearson's correlation coefficient must be carried out. The correlation between the main elements of CRM and the survival of

SMEs was determined using Pearson's correlation coefficient. The correlation between these variables is thus shown in Table 1 by the correlation coefficient.

Table 1 Pearson's correlation between CRM components and SME survival

		CRM Components	SME Survival
CRM Components	Pearson's Correlation	1	509**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	349	349
Manufacturing S.M.E. Survival	Pearson's Correlation	509**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	349	349

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

The correlation coefficient between CRM elements and manufacturing SMEs' survival is shown in Table 1 ($r = 0.509$, $p < 0.05$). The table of correlation coefficients demonstrates that the dependent variable (survival of manufacturing SME) and CRM components have a positive and significant relationship. The correlation coefficient is 0.509, which equals 50.9%, and the p-value is less than 0.05. With this level of significance, the null hypothesis was rejected, indicating that there is a significant and positive correlation between Nigerian manufacturing SME survival and CRM components (customer orientation, customer service, service quality, and compliant handling). Notably, the significance, strength, and positivity of the relationship between the two variables are all present. The factor loading of each CRM component was measured using the test, exploratory factor analysis (EFA), Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) analysis, and other tests, which are shown in Table 2.

Table 2 Exploratory factor analysis of the measurement of CRM components

Item	Mean	SD	Factor loading	Item total correlation
CRM components				
Complaint handling	5.31	2.381	.758	.631
Service quality	4.28	1.626	.727	.612
Customer orientation	4.09	1.251	.691	.583
Customer service	3.81	1.312	.542	.510

$KMO = .762$; $X^2 = 517.821$; $DF = 4$; $P < .001$; *Cronbach's $\alpha = .643$; Percentage of variance explained = 57.6%*.

Each measurement level used in the research construct was subjected to reliability analysis to determine its internal consistency level. Using IBM SPSS statistics version 27, the internal consistency of the EFA measurement's constituent parts and the items that resulted from it were examined separately. Customer service (0.642), complaint handling (0.681), service quality (0.639), and customer orientation (0.721) all have high Cronbach's alpha coefficients. An internal consistency of 0.692 was generated while manufacturing SME survival. Given that the Cronbach's alpha coefficients were above 0.600, no factor was excluded from the measurement model. The CRM components in this study were examined based on the EFA results using the multiple regression analysis/model measurement shown in Table 3. In order to obtain a clear, comprehensive picture, the development also combines the model summary, the ANOVA, and the coefficients in one large table.

Table 3 EM dimensions as predictors of sme survival

	R	R square	Adjusted square	R	F	Beta	T	Sig
	.672 ^a	.534	.491		18.217	----	----	.000 ^b
Complaint handling						-.281	-3.621	.000
Service quality						.142	2.472	.002
Customer orientation						.296	2.368	.001
Customer service						.178	3.273	.006
(Constant)						---	2.331	.002
a. Dependent Variable: manufacturing SME survival								
b. Predictors: (Constant) customer orientation, customer service, service quality, complaint handling								

According to Table 3, the regression model has a R square of 0.534 and an adjusted R square of 0.491. This indicates that the model's (CRM components) predictions account for 49.1% of the variations in the survival of manufacturing SMEs in Anambra State. This is significant at p 0.05, demonstrating that the survival of manufacturing SME and the independent variables of the various CRM components exhibit a strong correlation. These results support the alternative theory hypothesis that CRM significantly affects the viability of manufacturing SMEs. Remarkably, the standardised Beta and the corresponding P-values for complaint handling ($\beta = -0.281$, $p < 0.000$), service quality ($\beta = 0.142$, $p < 0.002$), customer orientation ($\beta = 0.296$, $p < 0.001$), and customer service ($\beta = 0.178$, $p < 0.006$), reveal that customer orientation made the most significant contribution to the model, followed by customer service, and then service quality. Based on these results, it is evident that customer orientation, customer service, and service quality jointly predict manufacturing SMEs' survival in Anambra State. At the same time, complaint handling also made a unique contribution concerning SME survival in this study. In light of this, one can state that CRM significantly affects the survival of manufacturing SMEs in Anambra State, Nigeria.

4. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

As most marketing companies continue to pave their paths to shift from transactional focus marketing towards relationship building, enhancing, and maintaining a marketing-oriented stand, customer orientation, customer service, service quality, and compliant handling remain the fundamental strategies to adopt for the realisation of a firm's set goals. These are evident from the statistical analysis done to ascertain how CRM affects the survival of manufacturing SMEs in the state of Anambra. Customer focus, customer satisfaction, and service excellence have a positive and significant impact on the survival of manufacturing SMEs in Anambra State, per the test. This finding is consistent with those of Bhat & Darzi (2016), Sampaio, Mogollon, and Rodrigues, Karim & Habiba (2020), and Enemu et al. (2023), who discovered that customer orientation, customer service, and service quality influence small and medium enterprises. This suggests that strong customer relationships fostered by customer orientation, service excellence, and service delivery are crucial in determining customer satisfaction and loyalty. It thus demonstrates that a company's performance and survival are primarily determined by how well it can satisfy its customers and earn their loyalty. This can be done when a company establishes, recognises, upholds, and caters to the various needs of its customers more efficiently than its competitors. As a result, to ensure the survival of manufacturing SMEs, the company must have a culture that is customer-centric and promotes ongoing relationships with clients. Making a customer-centric strategy is crucial for the manufacturing sector because of the high levels of customer contact that set it apart from other industries. The degree of CRM has a significant impact on the long-term survival of SMEs because a satisfied customer becomes a business partner.

The study did, however, make the novel discovery that handling complaints has a significant, yet unfavourable impact on the survival of manufacturing SMEs. This means that in Nigerian manufacturing SMEs, handling complaints is one of the key elements of CRM. However, the players in the manufacturing SME sector have given this element little to no attention. The conclusion that handling customer complaints

significantly affects firm performance is in line with Ndubuisi and Ling (2016) as well as Ihemereze and Onyia (2022). Manufacturing SMEs that effectively handle customer complaints can gain the satisfaction and loyalty of their customers.

Contrarily, if customer complaints are not adequately addressed, customers may file complaints with the regulatory body, court, or even the police, who may take action against the SME owners for negligence. Obasi et al. (2020) acknowledged that effective customer complaint management is a crucial component of ensuring customer satisfaction and retention and suggested that businesses should encourage customer complaints in order to identify service failures that may cause customer complaints, improve service delivery, provide the establishment of a customer complaint handling department, install a complaint database, use the database to track subsequent complaints, and resolve the complaint. Based on the foregoing, the study draws the conclusion that customer relationship management significantly influences small and medium-scale enterprises in Anambra State in terms of survival.

5. RESEARCH IMPLICATION

This study fills a research gap in the body of existing literature by focusing on the theoretical underpinnings and the Nigerian context while excluding CRM as anything other than a technological outcome. To examine their impact on the survival of manufacturing SMEs, the components of customer orientation, customer service, service quality, and compliant handling were synthesised. These elements offer guidance on how to achieve a comprehensive CRM success solution. This foundation's creation was based on research from authors like Bhat & Darzi (2016) and Karim & Habiba (2020), among others. Furthermore, research on the effects of CRM components on a firm's performance or survival is scarce; the current study fills some of this gap. To facilitate CRM implementation practises from a management perspective in Nigeria's manufacturing SME sector, the study has methodically proposed an integrated model.

The findings will assist managers in communicating with both new and existing customers about their marketing services while keeping the old customers happy with new CRM initiatives, from a managerial standpoint. Additionally, banks must continually try to comprehend how their customers' needs are changing so they can tailor their services appropriately. Additionally, manufacturing SMEs should teach their staff members how to design and build a customer database and use it effectively so that it increases customer loyalty. Additionally, the manufacturing SMEs would have to simultaneously qualify and quantify the customer database. To stay competitive in their industry, managers of SMEs must make sure that the quality of their goods and services is given top priority. The management of SMEs should instruct their frontline staff to treat customers politely and attentively, particularly those who have complaints about the services they received and emphasise the value of apologies and explanations to them.

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