

MARKET ORIENTATION PRACTICES AMONG SMALL BUSINESS MANAGERS IN THE OJO BUSINESS DISTRICT OF LAGOS STATE, NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

This study examined market orientation practices among small business managers in the Ojo Business District of Lagos State, Nigeria. Specifically, it identified existing market orientation practices, investigated key barriers to their implementation, and analysed how these barriers influence business performance. A descriptive survey design was adopted, and data were collected from 25 small business managers through structured questionnaires. The findings revealed that although managers moderately adopt customer-focused practices, other important dimensions of market orientation, such as competitor analysis and internal coordination, receive less attention. The study further identified limited financial resources, inadequate managerial skills, poor access to market information, and an unstable business environment as major barriers to effective implementation. These barriers reduce the ability of small business managers to translate market orientation into improved profitability, customer satisfaction, and competitiveness. Given the small sample size (N=25), the findings should be interpreted with caution, and future research with larger samples is recommended. The study concludes that targeted managerial training, improved access to finance, better market information systems, and supportive business policies are essential for strengthening the effectiveness, competitiveness, and sustainability of small businesses in Nigeria.

Keywords: Keywords: market orientation, small businesses, business performance, SMEs, Ojo Business District, Lagos State, Nigeria

Introduction

Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) are the backbone of the Nigerian economy, accounting for the majority of businesses and employment in the country. Despite their critical role, numerous studies have shown that a significant number of these enterprises operate below their full potential. A key factor often associated with business success in developed economies is market orientation (MO) the organizational culture that most effectively creates superior value for customers. While the positive influence of MO on performance is well-documented for large corporations, its application and effectiveness in the context of small businesses, particularly in volatile emerging economies like Nigeria, are less certain. Recent studies in Nigeria have produced contradictory findings; some indicate that entrepreneurial or learning orientations have a more significant impact on SME performance than market orientation (Sa'id et al., 2025; Sa'id, Abdul-Talib, & Hassan, 2025). This inconsistency suggests that the operationalization of market orientation is uniquely challenging for small firms, which often lack the formal structures, dedicated personnel, and financial resources to implement systematic market research and inter-functional coordination. Furthermore, the operational context in Nigeria creates a unique socio-economic environment that influences strategic orientation. Small businesses in Lagos State face severe challenges, including inadequate infrastructure, power supply issues, high inflation, and limited access to credit (Akingbade & Famodun, 2024).

The Ojo Business District in Lagos State, home to commercial hubs like the Alaba International Market, is a microcosm of this environment. It is a high-density, hyper-competitive marketplace where businesses rely heavily on informal networks and daily transactions, making the adoption of formal strategic orientations difficult. Therefore, while the theoretical benefits of market orientation are clear, the practical reality of implementing these principles in a resource-scarce and infrastructurally challenged setting remains an area requiring empirical investigation (Lasisi, 2024). Despite the widespread recognition that SMEs are vital to Nigeria's economic growth, a performance paradox persists: a large number of these enterprises continue to fail or stagnate within the first five years of operation. The Lagos Chamber of Commerce and Industry (LCCI) has repeatedly raised concerns that Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) are grappling with severe operational challenges, including insecurity and unreliable power supply, which slow down the pace of their business growth (Akingbade & Famodun, 2024). The core of this problem often lies in a strategic deficiency specifically, the inability to effectively sense and respond to market changes, a concept known as market orientation. Although prior studies have examined market orientation in Nigeria, a problematic gap remains regarding the "how" and "why" of its application in specific small business districts. Mixed results from quantitative studies show that while some strategic orientations are effective, market orientation sometimes yields a non-significant effect on performance (Sa'id et al., 2025). This indicates that simply possessing a market-oriented culture may not translate to performance due to intervening contextual factors such as infrastructure deficits, funding issues, or managerial mindsets (Sa'id, Kassim, et al., 2025).

Moreover, specific local government areas (LGAs) like Ojo have unique commercial dynamics distinct from the Lagos central business district. While Lagos has a rapidly growing startup ecosystem, businesses in areas like Ojo operate under different pressures, such as high rental costs for commercial property and dependence on traditional market structures (Lasisi, 2024). There is a scarcity of qualitative or case-based research that drills down to the level of the business manager in these specific districts to understand the practical barriers to implementing market orientation (Abubakar et al., 2024). Therefore, the problem this study addresses is: *Why do small businesses in the Ojo Business District struggle to adopt and benefit from market orientation practices?* While macroeconomic challenges are well documented, there is a lack of qualitative insight into the specific decision-making processes, resource

constraints, and environmental pressures faced by small business managers in this district. Understanding these specific barriers is essential for developing targeted intervention strategies to improve the survival and growth of SMEs in Lagos State.

The main objective of this study is to examine market orientation practices among small business managers in the Ojo Business District of Lagos State. Specifically, the study seeks to:

- i. Identify the specific market orientation practices currently being adopted by small business managers in the Ojo Business District.
- ii. Examine the key resource, environmental, and managerial barriers that hinder the effective implementation of market orientation among small businesses in the Ojo Business District.
- iii. Analyze the extent to which these barriers influence the ability of small business managers in the Ojo Business District to translate market orientation into improved business performance.

Literature Review

Market orientation

Market orientation is a multifaceted construct, frequently conceptualized as either an organizational culture or a behavioral process, which underpins the effective generation and dissemination of market intelligence throughout an enterprise (Mostafiz et al., 2021). This encompasses the systematic collection of data regarding customer needs and preferences, competitor activities, and broader exogenous market factors (Mahmutović, 2021; Wójcik-Karpacz et al., 2021). This strategic focus enables firms to develop and maintain superior customer value, thereby contributing to sustained profitability (Efrat & Asseraf, 2024). Market orientation fundamentally entails an "outside-in" approach, representing a core tenet of management philosophy geared towards long-term profitability by deeply understanding present and future customer requirements (Vlašić, 2022). A market-oriented firm is thus characterized by its dedication to comprehending customer needs, sharing this critical information across organizational silos, and fostering inter-functional coordination to deliver enhanced customer value (Ighomereho et al., 2022). This integrated approach, encompassing customer orientation, competitor orientation, and inter-functional coordination, is crucial for companies seeking to understand and adapt to dynamic market conditions (Wang, 2023). This involves a continuous process of gathering and utilizing market information to achieve strategic goals, allowing for rapid responses to evolving customer preferences and demands (Zabel & O'Brien, 2024). Narver and Slater's conceptualization of market orientation, widely applied in various industries, highlights three key dimensions: customer orientation, competitor orientation, and inter-functional coordination, which collectively provide a holistic view of how firms gather, disseminate, and utilize market information (Okello & Lutah, 2021). Customer orientation, for instance, mandates an organizational culture that prioritizes understanding both current and future customer needs through continuous engagement and feedback analysis (Jusni et al., 2023). This emphasis on customer insight is further elaborated by Kohli and Jaworski, who assert that a profound understanding of customer preferences, coupled with an awareness of competitors' influence on these preferences, is essential for effective customer-centric strategies (Lima et al., 2024). Likewise, competitor orientation involves systematically analyzing competitors' strengths, weaknesses, and strategic maneuvers to inform organizational decisions and anticipate market shifts (Chandio & Rizwan, 2021; Şahin & Sığrı, 2022).

Small Business

The concept of "small business" lacks a universally accepted definition, presenting challenges in academic research and policy formulation due to varying criteria across different contexts and jurisdictions (Sordi et al., 2024). These definitional inconsistencies frequently

stem from a blend of quantitative metrics, such as employee counts, revenue thresholds, and asset values, alongside qualitative characteristics, including management structure and market share (Lazăr et al., 2022; Marom, 2021). For instance, the European Commission defines small and medium-sized enterprises by limiting employees to 249 and setting turnover or balance sheet thresholds, while also considering ownership links that affect these quantitative criteria (Matejun, 2024). This stands in contrast to the diverse approaches taken by individual countries, where definitions can vary significantly; for example, Malaysian and Bangladeshi definitions factor in sales turnover and employee numbers, with distinct thresholds for manufacturing versus service sectors (Tehseen et al., 2021). Consequently, the diverse criteria employed globally have led to over 200 distinct interpretations of what constitutes an SME, even after some attempts at standardization (Oldemeyer et al., 2024). This divergence underscores the inherent difficulty in establishing a singular framework, as industry-specific capital requirements and national developmental stages often necessitate tailored definitional parameters (Joseph et al., 2021). Further complicating this landscape, qualitative criteria, encompassing aspects like management autonomy, organizational structure, and market influence, are sometimes integrated to provide a more nuanced understanding beyond purely quantitative measures (ElRaba'a & ElChamie, 2024).

Theoretical Framework

This study was anchored on Market Orientation Theory, particularly the classical works of Narver and Slater (1990) and Kohli and Jaworski (1990). The theory explains market orientation as an organisational culture and behavioural practice through which firms generate, share, and respond to market intelligence in order to create superior value for customers and improve business performance. Narver and Slater's model identifies three major dimensions of market orientation: customer orientation, competitor orientation, and inter-functional coordination. Customer orientation focuses on understanding and satisfying the needs of target customers; competitor orientation involves monitoring competitors' strengths, weaknesses, and strategies; while inter-functional coordination refers to the effective integration of organisational resources and activities to deliver superior customer value.

The theory is relevant to this study because small business managers operate in a highly competitive and dynamic environment where customer preferences, competitor actions, pricing pressures, and economic uncertainty constantly influence business survival. In the Ojo Business District, where many small businesses compete for customers, market orientation provides a useful framework for understanding how managers gather customer information, respond to market changes, monitor competitors, and coordinate business activities. Recent studies continue to show that customer orientation, competitor orientation, and inter-functional coordination have positive effects on SME performance, particularly in areas such as profitability, customer satisfaction, adaptability, and competitiveness (Josiah et al., 2022; Balarabe, 2024).

Furthermore, Market Orientation Theory helps explain why the adoption of market-oriented practices may not automatically result in improved business performance. Although small business managers may understand customer needs and respond to market trends, barriers such as limited finance, inadequate managerial skills, poor access to reliable market information, and an unstable business environment may weaken the effectiveness of these practices. This is consistent with recent evidence that market orientation enhances SME performance more effectively when firms possess the communication, coordination, and managerial capabilities needed to transform market knowledge into strategic action (Butkouskaya et al., 2024). Applying Market Orientation Theory therefore enables this study to examine three related issues: the extent to which small business managers practise market orientation, the barriers that limit its implementation, and the effect of these barriers on business performance. The theory also provides a basis for arguing that improving customer

focus, competitor analysis, internal coordination, market intelligence, and managerial capacity can enhance the sustainability and competitiveness of small businesses in the Nigerian context.

Empirical Review

Ijatuyi et al. (2024) explored the intersection of Corporate Entrepreneurship (CE) and Market Orientation (MO) and their collective impact on the performance of SMEs in Ibadan, Nigeria. Two research questions were raised, and two hypotheses were tested. The study employed the survey research design with five hundred and forty-six (546) respondents as subjects. Representative SMEs were purposively selected from each of the 11 local government areas in Ibadan Metropolis. Primary data was employed using the questionnaire to elicit information from the respondents. Data collected were analysed using Canonical Correlation and Multiple Regression. Findings indicated a combined impact of CE and MO on the performance of SMEs with a Canonical Correlation of 0.510 at $p < 0.0$. The results also showed that corporate innovation, corporate pro-activeness, risk taking, entrepreneurial culture, intelligence generation, intelligence dissemination and responsiveness using Multiple Regression jointly predicted SMEs performance at $F = 19.501$; $R = .450$, $R^2 = .202$, $Adj. R^2 = .192$; $P < 0.000$.

Adetayo et al. (2025) explored how different dimensions of market orientation contribute to the sustainability of SMEs in Nigeria. A total of 228 SME owners and managers were selected in Ogun State using a non-parametric sampling approach. Importance-Performance Map Analysis (IPMA) was used to evaluate how each dimension of market orientation contributes to SME sustainability. The results show that market responsiveness has the highest performance score of 69.18 and an importance score of 0.276. Intelligence dissemination has a performance score of 71.16 but is not a key determinant, with a negative importance score of -0.123. Competitor orientation, customer orientation, inter-functional coordination, market responsiveness, and value creation are all in the fourth quadrant, emphasizing their importance for SME sustainability.

Adetayo et al. (2025) investigated the moderating role of talent management between strategic marketing practices and performance of small and medium enterprises (SMEs) in Ekiti State, Nigeria. Specifically, the study examined the extent to which talent management moderated the effects of market orientation, innovation orientation and digital marketing on performance of SMEs in Ekiti State, Nigeria. From the 928 registered SMEs in Ekiti State, Nigeria, 395 was selected using multi-stage sampling technique. From the five previously stratified groups namely printing, fast food and food processing, metal work and fabrication, agribusiness and laundry services, 55, 75, 98, 87 and 80 SMEs were selected respectively. A self-administered semi-structured questionnaire was used to collect the primary data used for the study and were analysed with the aid of multiple regression and logit models. The results from the study indicated a positive and significant effects of market orientation, innovation orientation and digital marketing on performance of SMEs in Ekiti State, Nigeria. Also the study revealed that talent management moderated positively and significantly between strategic marketing practices and performance of small and medium enterprises in Ekiti State, Nigeria.

Methodology

This study adopted a descriptive survey research design to examine market orientation practices among small business managers in the Ojo Business District of Lagos State, Nigeria. The descriptive approach was considered appropriate because it enabled the systematic collection of data on existing market orientation practices, barriers to implementation, and perceived effects on business performance without manipulating any variables.

The population of the study comprised small business managers operating within the Ojo Business District. A sample of 25 small business managers was selected using purposive sampling. The purposive sampling technique was used because the study required respondents who were directly involved in business management, customer relations, marketing decisions,

and day-to-day operational planning. This ensured that the data were obtained from individuals with relevant knowledge of market orientation practices and the challenges affecting their implementation.

Given the relatively small sample size of 25 respondents, the study was framed as an exploratory pilot study rather than a basis for broad statistical generalisation across the entire Ojo Business District. The sample size was considered suitable for generating preliminary insights into the market orientation practices of small business managers, identifying common barriers, and providing a foundation for future studies with larger and more representative samples.

Primary data were collected through a structured questionnaire. The questionnaire was divided into sections covering market orientation practices, including customer focus, competitor awareness, and coordination of business activities; barriers to implementation, including financial, environmental, informational, and managerial constraints; and indicators of business performance, such as profitability, customer satisfaction, and competitiveness. The instrument was designed using a Likert scale format to capture respondents' perceptions and experiences effectively.

Data collected were analysed using descriptive statistical techniques, including frequencies, percentages, and mean scores. These methods were used to summarise the responses and provide clear insights into the pattern of market orientation practices among small business managers, as well as the major barriers affecting their implementation. The findings were presented in tables and discussed in relation to the specific objectives of the study.

Results

It should be noted that the findings presented in Tables 1, 2, and 3 are based on a small sample of 25 respondents. Therefore, the results should be interpreted as preliminary and illustrative rather than definitive. Since the Ojo Business District contains a large and diverse population of small businesses, including major commercial clusters such as Alaba International Market, the findings cannot be reliably generalised to all small business managers in the district. Rather, they provide an exploratory indication of the market orientation practices, barriers, and performance-related challenges reported by the sampled respondents.

Table 1: Market Orientation Practices among Small Business Managers

S/N	Market Orientation Practice	SA	A	U	D	SD	Total	Mean
1	Regularly seek customer feedback	10 (40%)	8 (32%)	3 (12%)	3 (12%)	1 (4%)	25	3.92
2	Monitor competitors' activities	9 (36%)	7 (28%)	4 (16%)	3 (12%)	2 (8%)	25	3.72
3	Adjust products/services based on customer needs	11 (44%)	9 (36%)	2 (8%)	2 (8%)	1 (4%)	25	4.08
4	Share market information within the business	8 (32%)	10 (40%)	3 (12%)	3 (12%)	1 (4%)	25	3.84
5	Respond quickly to changes in customer demand	12 (48%)	7 (28%)	3 (12%)	2 (8%)	1 (4%)	25	4.12

Sources: (Field Survey, 2026)

The results in Table 1 show that the sampled small business managers reported a moderate to high level of market orientation practices. The highest mean score was recorded for responding quickly to changes in customer demand, with a mean value of 4.12. This suggests that many respondents attempted to adjust their business activities in response to changing customer

preferences. Similarly, adjusting products or services based on customer needs recorded a mean score of 4.08, while regularly seeking customer feedback recorded a mean score of 3.92. These findings indicate that customer-focused practices were relatively common among the sampled managers. However, monitoring competitors' activities recorded a lower mean score of 3.72, while sharing market information within the business recorded a mean score of 3.84. Although these scores remain positive, they suggest that competitor analysis and internal coordination were less strongly emphasised than direct customer responsiveness. This implies that market orientation among the respondents may have been practised more informally and reactively than through structured market intelligence, strategic planning, or coordinated information-sharing systems.

Table 2: Barriers to the Implementation of Market Orientation

S/N	Barrier	SA	A	U	D	SD	Total	Mean
1	Limited financial resources	13 (52%)	7 (28%)	2 (8%)	2 (8%)	1 (4%)	25	4.16
2	Lack of access to reliable market information	11 (44%)	8 (32%)	3 (12%)	2 (8%)	1 (4%)	25	4.04
3	Intense market competition	10 (40%)	9 (36%)	3 (12%)	2 (8%)	1 (4%)	25	3.96
4	Inadequate managerial/marketing skills	12 (48%)	6 (24%)	4 (16%)	2 (8%)	1 (4%)	25	4.04
5	Unstable business environment (economic/policy changes)	14 (56%)	6 (24%)	2 (8%)	2 (8%)	1 (4%)	25	4.20

Sources: (Field Survey, 2026)

Table 2 presents the perceived barriers to the implementation of market orientation among the sampled respondents. The highest mean score was recorded for unstable business environment, with a mean value of 4.20. This suggests that changes in economic conditions, policy uncertainty, and other environmental pressures were perceived as major constraints affecting the ability of small business managers to apply market-oriented practices effectively. Limited financial resources also recorded a high mean score of 4.16, indicating that financial constraint was a major challenge among the respondents. This may limit the ability of small businesses to invest in customer research, marketing activities, staff development, technology, and business expansion. Lack of access to reliable market information and inadequate managerial or marketing skills each recorded a mean score of 4.04, showing that information gaps and skill deficiencies were also important barriers. Intense market competition recorded a mean score of 3.96, suggesting that competitive pressure was also recognised as a challenge, although it ranked slightly lower than financial and environmental constraints. The results indicate that the implementation of market orientation among the sampled small business managers was constrained by both internal and external factors. Internally, limited finance and inadequate managerial skills restricted the capacity of managers to practise market orientation systematically. Externally, unstable business conditions and intense competition created additional pressures that made long-term market-focused planning difficult.

Table 3: Influence of Barriers on Translating Market Orientation into Business Performance

S/N	Influence Statement	SA	A	U	D	SD	Total	Mean
1	Barriers reduce ability to satisfy customer needs effectively	12 (48%)	8 (32%)	2 (8%)	2 (8%)	1 (4%)	25	4.08
2	Barriers limit business growth and profitability	13 (52%)	7 (28%)	2 (8%)	2 (8%)	1 (4%)	25	4.16
3	Barriers hinder quick response to market changes	11 (44%)	9 (36%)	2 (8%)	2 (8%)	1 (4%)	25	4.04
4	Barriers affect ability to retain customers	10 (40%)	8 (32%)	4 (16%)	2 (8%)	1 (4%)	25	3.96
5	Barriers weaken competitive advantage	12 (48%)	7 (28%)	3 (12%)	2 (8%)	1 (4%)	25	4.04

Sources: (Field Survey, 2026)

The results in Table 3 show that the identified barriers negatively affected the ability of the sampled small business managers to translate market orientation into improved business performance. The highest mean score was recorded for the statement that barriers limit business growth and profitability, with a mean value of 4.16. This suggests that although some respondents adopted customer-focused practices, financial, managerial, informational, and environmental constraints reduced their ability to convert these practices into stronger financial outcomes.

The statement that barriers reduce the ability to satisfy customer needs effectively recorded a mean score of 4.08. This indicates that constraints such as limited finance and poor access to market information may weaken the capacity of businesses to respond adequately to customer expectations. Barriers also hindered quick response to market changes and weakened competitive advantage, with both items recording mean scores of 4.04. This suggests that the ability of small businesses to remain adaptive and competitive was affected by the challenges identified in Table 2.

The effect of barriers on customer retention recorded a mean score of 3.96. Although this was the lowest mean score in Table 3, it still indicates a generally positive level of agreement among respondents. This implies that the barriers faced by small business managers may also affect long-term customer relationships, especially where businesses are unable to provide consistent value, maintain service quality, or respond effectively to changing customer needs.

A further issue that should be acknowledged is the similarity in response patterns across Tables 2 and 3. For instance, the “strongly disagree” column recorded 1 respondent, representing 4%, for four out of five items in both tables. This level of uniformity is unusual and may suggest the possibility of acquiescence bias, where respondents tend to agree with statements regardless of their specific content. Consequently, while the results provide useful preliminary insights, they should be interpreted with caution and strengthened in future studies through larger sample sizes, more diverse respondents, and additional methods such as interviews or focus group discussions.

Discussion of Findings

The findings of this study reveal that small business managers in the Ojo Business District demonstrate a moderate level of market orientation, with stronger emphasis on customer-focused practices than on competitor analysis and internal coordination. This aligns with existing literature which suggests that small businesses in developing economies often prioritize direct customer interactions due to their immediate impact on sales, while neglecting

more structured strategic practices (Akinyele, 2010). The high mean scores recorded for responsiveness to customer needs and product adjustments indicate that managers are aware of the importance of satisfying customers, consistent with the customer orientation component of Market Orientation Theory (Narver & Slater, 1990).

However, the study also found that market orientation practices are largely informal and reactive rather than systematic. This supports the argument by Kohli and Jaworski (1990) that effective market orientation requires not only responsiveness but also organized intelligence generation and dissemination. The relatively lower emphasis on competitor monitoring and internal information sharing suggests a gap in the full adoption of market orientation dimensions, which may limit the overall effectiveness of these practices.

Furthermore, the study identified significant barriers particularly financial constraints, unstable business environments, and inadequate managerial skills that hinder the effective implementation of market orientation. These findings are consistent with recent studies highlighting that SMEs in Nigeria face structural and operational challenges that restrict their strategic capabilities (SMEDAN, 2021). The high mean scores for these barriers indicate that both internal and external factors play a critical role in shaping business practices. For instance, limited financial resources reduce the ability of managers to invest in market research and innovation, while environmental instability creates uncertainty that discourages long-term planning.

Importantly, the study shows that these barriers significantly affect the translation of market orientation into improved business performance. This supports empirical evidence that while market orientation is positively related to performance, its impact is contingent on the firm's ability to effectively implement it (Narver & Slater, 1990). The constraints identified in this study weaken competitive advantage, reduce customer satisfaction, and limit profitability, thereby diminishing the potential benefits of market-oriented strategies. The findings suggest that although small business managers in Ojo recognize and partially apply market orientation practices, their effectiveness is constrained by contextual challenges. Addressing these barriers through capacity building, access to finance, and supportive policies is essential for enhancing the performance and sustainability of small businesses in Nigeria.

Conclusion

This study examined market orientation practices among small business managers in the Ojo Business District of Lagos State, with a focus on identifying existing practices, assessing the barriers to their implementation, and analyzing how these barriers affect business performance. The findings indicate that while small business managers demonstrate a reasonable level of customer-oriented behavior such as responding to customer needs and adjusting products or services other critical dimensions of market orientation, including competitor analysis and internal coordination, are less emphasized. The study further revealed that several significant barriers hinder the effective implementation of market orientation. Key among these are limited financial resources, inadequate managerial and marketing skills, lack of access to reliable market information, and an unstable business environment. These challenges collectively restrict the ability of small business managers to adopt structured and proactive marketing strategies. As a result, many businesses operate in a reactive manner, limiting their capacity to anticipate market changes and sustain competitive advantage. Importantly, the study established that these barriers have a substantial negative influence on the ability of small business managers to translate market orientation practices into improved business performance. Issues such as reduced customer satisfaction, limited profitability, weak competitive positioning, and poor customer retention were identified as outcomes of these constraints. This suggests that the mere presence of market-oriented practices is insufficient without the necessary resources, skills, and supportive environment to implement them effectively. Enhancing market orientation among small businesses in the Ojo Business District

therefore requires deliberate efforts to address these barriers. Interventions such as managerial training, improved access to finance, and supportive government policies are essential to enable small business managers to fully leverage market orientation for better performance and long-term sustainability.

Recommendation

Based on the findings of this study, several recommendations are proposed to enhance the adoption and effectiveness of market orientation practices among small business managers in the Ojo Business District.

1. Firstly, there is a need for capacity building through targeted training and development programmes. Small business managers should be equipped with relevant marketing knowledge and managerial skills, particularly in areas such as market research, customer relationship management, competitive analysis, and internal coordination. Government agencies such as SMEDAN, business associations, and private organisations can play a key role in organising workshops, seminars, and mentoring programmes to improve these competencies.
2. Secondly, access to finance should be improved to enable small businesses to invest in market-oriented activities. Financial institutions, microfinance banks, and relevant government bodies should design and implement accessible credit schemes, low-interest loans, and business support grants for small enterprises. Such financial support would help small business managers to invest in customer research, product improvement, digital tools, staff training, and promotional activities.
3. Thirdly, there is a need to promote the use of simple and affordable market information systems. Small business managers should be encouraged to leverage digital platforms, including social media, mobile applications, and basic customer database tools, to gather customer feedback, monitor competitors, and track market trends in real time.
4. Additionally, policymakers should work towards creating a more stable and supportive business environment. This includes maintaining consistent economic policies, improving infrastructure, reducing regulatory bottlenecks, and providing targeted support for small businesses. A more predictable business environment would enable small business managers to plan more effectively and respond better to customer and market changes.

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