

## **PRODUCT STRATEGIES AND THE PERFORMANCE OF AGRO-BASED SMES IN ABA, ABIA STATE**

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### **Abstract**

This study is on effect of product strategies and the performance of agro-based small and medium scale enterprises (ASMEs) in Aba, Abia State. The study examined effect of product quality strategy, product image strategy, product branding strategy, product packaging strategy and the performance of agro-based small and medium scale enterprises in Aba, such as Valumbra Flour Industries, Plannet Palm Seed Industries, J. Udeagbala Holdings Nigeria Limited and Mikechips Industries. Survey design was used to gather data required for the study. The study covers marketing activities of manufacturers, retailers as well as the distributors of agro-based products in Aba. The population of the study comprises all registered agro-based small and medium scale enterprises (ASMEs) in Aba. The Taro Yamans' formula was used to determine the sample size, and the simple random sampling technique was applied. The primary and secondary sources of data collection was used. Questionnaire was the research instrument for data collection. Chi-square and multiple regression was used for data analysis because bivariate hypotheses were tested. The result of the study is that product quality strategy, product image strategy and product packaging strategy has significant effect on the performance of agro-based SMEs in Aba. The study therefore recommend that agro-based SMEs should make quality the focus. It also recommends that Nigeria Government should support the ASMEs, by financing the entrepreneurs to create more capital for investment. Finally the study recommends more findings on others product strategies in other to improve the performance of the ASMEs in Aba, Abia State.

**Keywords:** Product Strategies, Business Performance, ASMEs, Product Quality, Product Image, Product Branding, Product Packaging.

### **1.1 Background to the study**

Global market competition and the need to gain larger market share, increase sales, attract new users, and retain existing customers, has triggered the quest for suitable and appropriate strategies to achieve optimum performance in industries. In Aba, Abia State, the present business environment is characterized by high level of competition, dynamism and sophistication (Uchegbunam et al., 2015). Consequently, entrepreneurs are adapting to designing

and implementing strategies that will enable them not only to achieve but sustain a competitive advantage. Product Strategies available to them include product quality strategy, product image strategy, product branding strategy, product packaging strategy among others.

Strategies are vital components in organizations management process (Kotler, 2010). This is because, strategy sets the pace and gives direction firms or organization should to follow to perform well. Every organization requires strategies to effectively manage its products. A product is a bundle of benefits or utilities packaged and made available to consumers to satisfy their needs or wants (Kotler & Armstrong, 2010). It can also mean anything of value either tangible or intangible that can be offered to a market for attention, acquisition and consumption (Odigbo, Kajang & Ufot, 2015). Product strategies indicate marketing dynamics on individual firms as a key approach in response to competitive behaviour. Product strategy is composed of a variety of sequential processes, to effectively achieve the vision of the organization.

In Aba, there exist many agro-based small and medium scale enterprises (ASMEs) that are indigenously owned and managed by the people. Agro-based small and medium scale enterprise (ASMEs) are enterprises that make use of agricultural produce as raw materials in further production. ASMEs selected include; Valumbra Flour Industries, Plannet Palm Seed Industries, J. Udeagbala Holdings Nigeria Ltd and Mikechips Industries. Their products include; palm kernel and palm oil industries, cassava starch and flour industries, fruit and vegetable canning industries, wheat flour industries among others. These quality agro-products are not well patronized due to the negative image syndrome 'Aba-made products'. The state government has made several efforts to improve the operational standards of SMEs in Aba by advocating for patronage of made-in-Aba products (Okezie, 2017). This was in an effort to manage the image of Aba-made products as effective image management is crucial to both business organizations and nations of the world. When the image of the organization is well managed and protected, optimum performance can be achieved because, perceptions and opinions are formed on the basis of acquired knowledge which is anchored on the available information. It is clear, there is a slight euphemism on Aba-made agro- products, in spite of the effort made by the ASMEs in meeting required standards. The application of product strategy is necessary. The study seeks to examine the effect of product strategies as a successful tool in improving the performance of ASMEs in Aba, Abia state.

## **1.2 Statement of the problem**

The study looks into the role of product strategies towards marketing performance of agro-based SMEs in Aba, Abia State, with selected SMEs which include; Valumbra Flour Industries, Plannet Palm Seed Industries, J. Udeagbala Holdings Nigeria Ltd and Mikechips Industries. It is believed that, there are certain factors that affect the performance of agro-based SMEs in Aba and consequently result to a fall in market growth. These factors include; quality compromise, made in-Aba syndrome, dominance of the market by foreign products, unavailability of the platform required in meeting international standards, interference of market forces, and pressure from contractors to lower standards, among others. Quality compromise is one of the major factors challenging the performance of ASMEs in Aba, Abia State. Reduction in the quality of a product discourages consumers and consequently influence their purchase decision which may likely affect the performance of the product. Consumers are moved by what they see and a quality product encourage repeat purchase while low quality product may result to cognitive dissonance(Mogaba,2016)Made-in-Aba syndrome is also a challenge to the performance of agro-based SMEs. The negative image syndrome on Aba made products has greatly challenged the performance of ASMEs. Some consumers perceive made-in Aba products as inferior or substandard. This has been a concern to the entrepreneurs and consequently encouraged the

importation of foreign goods which greatly affect the performance of home-made products. The desires to sell off old stock most time compel some local manufacturers to label their products “Made in Italy”. This is an image management problem (Howard, 2010).

Product adulteration is also a threat to the performance of ASMEs in Aba, most products are manufactured with extremely poor quality to compete with quality products in the market. It discourages the performance of Aba-made agro products because it does not truly represent the place of manufacture as well as country of origin. Government supports such as finance, workshop and training or capacity building is not easily accessed by the ASMEs. Due to weak capital, the ASMEs may not have quality and durable products. However, in spite of quality compromise, made-in-Aba syndrome, dominance of the market by foreign products among other factors, agro-based industries in Aba still have market growth potentials subject to the level of consumers demand. Marketing variables such as; product advertising, product design, product durability among others, may have been used as a strategy to improve the performance of ASMEs, but it has brought little or insignificant increase in their performance. It is against this background that the study is intended to ascertain the extent product quality, product image, product branding, and product packaging, enhance the performance of ASMEs in Aba, in terms of sales volume, government patronage, rate of corporate orders, international demand and market share.

### **1.3 Objectives of the study**

The specific objectives include to:

- i. determine the effect of product quality and the performance of agro-based small and medium scale enterprises in Aba, Abia State.
- ii. examine the effect of product image and performance of agro-based small and medium scale enterprises in Aba, Abia State.
- iii. determine the effect of product branding and the performance of agro-based small and medium scale enterprises in Aba, Abia State.
- iv. examine the effect of product packaging and the performance of agro-based small and medium scale enterprises in Aba, Abia State.

### **1.4 Research questions**

The following research questions guided the study:

- i. To what extent does product quality as a strategy enhance the performance of agro-based small and medium scale enterprises in Aba, Abia State?
- ii. Could product image significantly enhance the performance of agro-based small and medium scale enterprises in Aba, Abia State?
- iii. Could product branding enhance the performance of agro-based small and medium scale enterprises in Aba, Abia State?
- iv. To what extent does product packaging as a strategy affect the performance of agro-based small and medium scale enterprises in Aba, Abia State?

### **1.5 Research hypotheses**

The following null hypotheses will be tested in the study:

- i.  $H_{01}$ : Product quality strategy does not significantly affect performance of agro-based small and medium scale enterprises in Aba, Abia State.
- ii.  $H_{02}$ : Product image strategy does not significantly enhance the performance of agro-based small and medium scale enterprises in Aba, Abia State.
- iii.  $H_{03}$ : Product branding strategy does not significantly affect the performance of agro-based small and medium scale enterprises in Aba, Abia State.

- iv. H<sub>04</sub>: Product packaging strategy does not significantly affect the performance of agro-based small and medium scale enterprises in Aba, Abia State.

## 1.6 Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

The study is anchored on the theory of total quality management (TQM).

### 1.6.1 Total Quality Management (TQM)

TQM is a management approach to quality improvement. It is a recent and popular theoretical orientation that introduces quality and continuous improvement processes into organizational activities. TQM is an umbrella methodology for continually improving the quality of all processes; it draws on knowledge of the principles and practices of behavioral sciences, analysis of quantitative and non-quantitative data, economic theories and process analysis. Inyang (2004) noted that TQM as a management system is revolutionizing management practices by helping organizations provide the highest quality products and services that far exceeds customers' expectations. This implies that agro-based SMEs in Abia State should offer quality products that have the ability not only to satisfy but exceed consumers' expectation. To ensure that the expectations of the consumers are met and core competency maintained, and performance enhanced in small and medium scale enterprises, as well as the needs of customers been met, the concept of TQM should be incorporated into all aspect of ASMEs operations in Aba, Abia State to enhance performance using quality as a focus (Kreitner,1995).

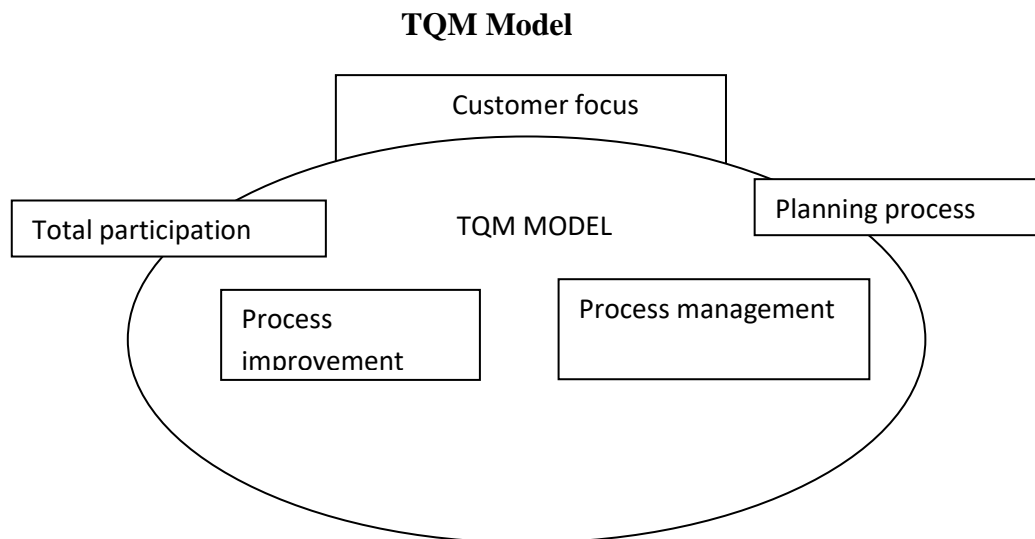


Fig 1. TQM model. Source: adapted from professional total quality management theory.

TQM requires a new process thinking mindset. Entrepreneurs must realize that everything they do is part of a process. The focus shifts from managing outcomes to managing and improving processes; from what to do to how to do the processes better (Crosby, 1979). Quality performance expands to include how well each part of the process works and the relationship of each part to the process. Also, process improvement focuses on continuously achieving the greatest potential benefit for our customers. The first step understand the customer. TQM is customer focus, organization that want to do well in business must first understand the competitors customers, their buying behaviour and their preference to product quality (Juran, 1988). The planning process is the glue that holds together all TQM activity. TQM organizations understand that customers will only be satisfied when they consistently receive products and services that meet their needs, and are delivered when expected, and are priced for value. TQM

organizations use the techniques of process management to develop cost-controlled processes that are stable and capable of meeting customer expectations.

TQM organizations also understand that exceptional performance today may be unacceptable performance in the future so they use the concepts of process improvement to achieve both breakthrough gains and incremental continuous improvement or performance. The last element of TQM is total participation. It is believed that all work is performed by people, so it begins with leadership (Garvin, 1988). The leaders must carry people along to achieve organizational goal, in relation to product quality strategy, the entrepreneurs must ensure that production and decision process involves everybody in the organization to bring out the best in quality of their product and ensure optimum performance.

The theory of cognitive dissonance and Total Quality Management (TQM) used in this study, help in explaining the importance of quality in every product. If the agro-based manufacturers in Aba see quality as a focus, there will be increase in patronage of their products and optimum performance will be achieved. Thus, entrepreneurs should improve quality of their products and outline specific changes to their operation. However, in the business world today, it has been discovered that quality is the pivot to organizing excellence and ultimate customer satisfaction. The British Standard Institution defined quality as the totality of features and characteristics of a product or services that bear on its ability to satisfy stated needs (Ibijola, 2014).

Consequently, it has become imperative for manufacturing organizations in order to meet up with the current global challenges. Successful entrepreneurs understand the powerful impact customer-defined quality can have on business. For this reason many competitive firms continually increase their quality standards (Ezeani & Ibijola, 2017). Quality standards attract consumers to buy more of a product.

Making quality a priority means putting consumers' needs first. What the consumer wants in every product is satisfaction, since quality products will give satisfaction to the consumer, quality should be given to every product (Kotler, 2010). Therefore the application of total quality management which is quality focus will go a long way in changing consumer perception about Aba-made agro-based products. In the case of cognitive dissonance theory, the ASMEs in Aba are faced with negative image problem. Consumers will be satisfied with the first purchase and a repeat purchase will be sure if the product offered at the first time meets or exceeds his expectations, in other words, there will be no dissonance. Because perception and opinion are formed based on the available knowledge or information. Offering satisfactory quality to the market will attract more consumer patronage. But low quality will lead to a decline in patronage.

Management of customers perception on Aba-made agro-products requires understanding of the ideas and feelings of the customers towards Aba made products, this will help to separate the cognition which is consistent with the other. Attractive quality will ensure satisfaction and conformity to the manufacturers' claim about the product. It can change the perception of a customer who had developed dissonance on a product. Agro-based SMEs will advance their product strategies and performance by tightening some of the already strict standards with regards to product quality.

### **1.6.2 Agro-Based SMEs in Aba**

Several research has been conducted on the performance of agro-based SMEs but, the performance of Agro-based SMEs in Aba has been an issue of both state and national concern because, majority of agro-businesses concentrate in Aba, and the presence of major relevant agricultural institutions such as Michael Okpara University of Agriculture, Umudike, National Root Crops Research Institute, Abia State agricultural development program (ADP) and State Ministry of Agriculture Headquarters in the area has made it easy for ASMEs to operate in the

state despite its' numerous challenges. These institutions are vested with providing research and extension assistance to the various agribusinesses in the catchments areas of their operation (Onwumere, 2008). They facilitate the development of new agro-products that will be used in further production by the agro-based enterprises in Aba and other states. Agro-based SMEs has contributed greatly to employment generation in Aba and required support to meet the requisite certification to for best global practices and standard. The percentage of employment created by SMEs in Abia are 2.15million which indicate high level of employment by SMEs in Aba.

Ayozie et al. (2013) noted that majority of small scale enterprises developed from the cottage industries to small enterprises and from small scale to medium and large enterprises. Small and medium scale enterprises undoubtedly contribute about 75% to the development of the economy (SMEDAN and National Bureau of Statistics collaborative survey; selected findings 2003) SMEs are usually associated with little capital outlay, minimal fixed assets, highly localized in the area of operation, and often with unsophisticated management structure (Ebitu, Basil & Ufot, 2015). This is because SMEs are characterized with the management of the enterprises by the owners and it is usually personalized.

According to Ogechukwu in Ebitu (2016) the contribution of SMEs to the national development cannot be overemphasized. He pointed out that SMEs encourages self-employment and entrepreneurship amongst the youth both in the urban and rural area and at the same time discourages urban- rural migration which most times could be as a result of frustration, arising from poor standard of living and unemployment. He noted that generation of employment for the citizenry has been one of the major functions of SMEs in Nigeria. Other contribution of SMEs to national development according to him include; establishment of man-power development support schemes, rural development and achievement of a meaningful level of broad economy, reduction of dependent on government and large firms salaries employment, upgrade in social status which has showcased Nigerian youths as very successful entrepreneurs. The small and medium scale enterprises are the engine of growth of economies around the globe. Industry sources have established that an average of 70% of business operations in world economy is accounted for by SMEs (Egugozie, 2007).

Research has shown that small and medium scale enterprises have the capacity to influence the entire socio economic development in Igbo land if it is well managed. This is because SMEs remain the driver of economic activities in the nation, while Abuja is Nigeria's political capital and Lagos its' economic capital, Abia State is undoubtedly Nigeria SMEs capital (Ojo 2017). Therefore, it is very necessary for small and medium scale enterprises (SMEs) in Abia State to adopt product strategy that could give them a competitive edge and enable the enterprises to perform well in the market.

### **1.6.3 Studies on SMEs**

A study by Uchegbunnam et al (2015) on competitive strategy and the performance of selected SMEs in Nigeria, aims at examining how competitive strategies, such as product quality, distinct product features and value adding capacity, influence the performance of SMEs in Nigeria. The study revealed that in a dense competitive business environment such as Nigeria survival is the top most priority of firms. The study suggests that entrepreneurs should adopt some of the strategies such as product quality, product image among others, to enhance performance and as well as compete favorably with others in the market. A research conducted by Eniola and Harry (2014) on SME firms performance in Nigeria revealed that SMEs sector is a major engine which encourages the growth of jobs and wealth creation in the country's economic system. The study was conducted to look into the SME sustainable competitive advantage and emphasis on its growing importance. It also looked in some of the strategies that enhance the performance of SMEs in Nigeria. The study concluded that optimum performance can only be achieved through

the adoption and application of strategies that can enhance the performance of the firms using strategies such as product quality, product image, among others. In the case of product strategies and the performance of SMEs, how well the product is packaged attracts customers and compels them to buy more and even make a repeat purchase (Mogaba, 2015).

A study by Nomsa et al (2017) on strategic planning in small and medium scale enterprises(SMEs) revealed that, even though SMEs contribute significantly to economic development, they are susceptible to poor performance and ultimate collapse. Hence, SMEs must adopt strategies to enhance their performance in the market. A research conducted by Adewumi (2008) on agro- based SMEs outlook in Nigeria also reveals that Nigeria SMEs are largely dominated by small and medium scale agro-based enterprises specializing in production of bulk commodities consumed in homes and industries and for export promotions, especially in cash crops and fruit production and processing. The study concluded that despite the bulk production of cash crops and other agro- products, the agro-based SMEs still experience a great fall in market growth. The study suggested that ASMEs should adopt some strategies to enhance its performance. A study by Oyeniyi (2009) on analysis of Nigerian consumers perception of foreign products revealed that product quality, product design, price and packaging influence product patronage.

By extension, it implies that customers will patronize more of the product if it has the required quality, if it is affordable and if it has and attractive packaging. A study by Egbuna et al. (2013) on small and medium enterprises and economic development in Nigeria reveals that in other well-coordinated advanced countries, 15% of the national earnings are generated from agriculture/Agro industries, while in Nigeria, less than 10% of their national earnings is generated from agriculture/agro- based Industries. He also noted that, despite the public outcry, agricultural participation in Nigeria is in constant decline when compared to other sectors of the economy such as tourism and energy to gross domestic product (GDP). The study conclude that poor economic planning, lack of political economic initiatives among other factors are responsible for the failure of investing in small-scale agro-industry in Nigeria, the study recommended appropriate strategies such as product quality strategies, product branding among others to be adopted by the SMEs in Nigeria to enhance productivity and improve performance.

**Conceptual Model of the study Independent variables Dependent variables**  
**Product strategies performance of ASMEs**

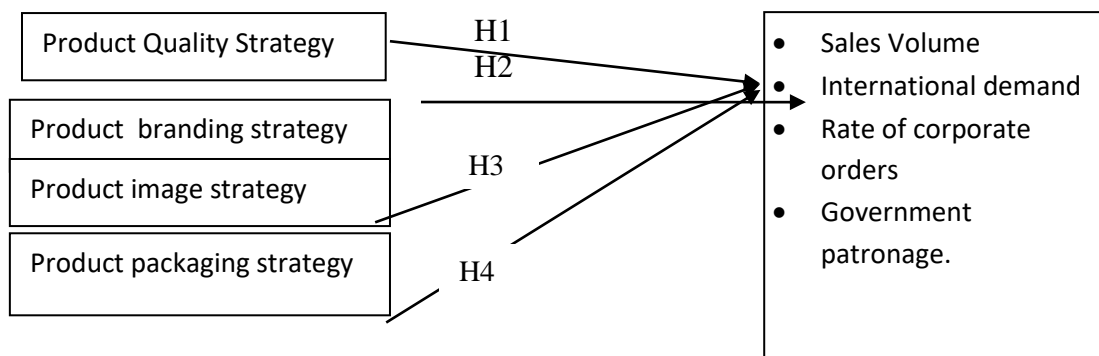


Fig. 3: Source: Adapted from Kotler’s total service product concept (2013) and modified by the researcher.

The concept of product quality as applied in this study represents the characteristics of a product that attracts consumers. It also explains the ability of a product to constantly satisfy

consumer (Kotler, 2012). The concept of product perception also implies that consumers are moved by what they see or perceive. In fact the consumer is guided by his perceptual power which also guides him in decision taking about the product to purchase. Product perception is a process by which individuals select, organize and interpret the value of products offered to them (Julius & Micheal, 2004). If they see the product interesting, they will make a purchase.

### 1.7 Research Methodology

Survey research design was adopted for the study. The study was conducted at Aba, Abia State, located in the eastern part of Nigeria. There exist many ASMEs indigenously owned and managed by the people. Agro-based industries have been a source of employment and revenue generation to the State. The population of this study comprised all the registered agro-based small and medium scale enterprises (ASMEs) operating within Aba South and Aba North Local Government Area in Aba, Abia State. The study will make use of selected SMEs in Aba that fall under the category of micro, small and medium scale enterprises. According to National bureau of Statistics, there is a total number of 4,809 SMEs in Aba in 2023. This forms the population of the study.

From this working population, a sample size of 328 was determined the Taro Yamane’s formular. The study adopted the simple random sampling technique. The instrument for data collection is the questionnaire which is structured in a five point likert scale of strongly agreed (SA), Agreed (A), Undecided (U), Disagreed (D), and strongly disagreed (SD).

To ensure the reliability of the instrument, 20 copies of the questionnaire were administered to 20 SMEs in Aba South and Aba North Local Government Areas. The Cronbach

Reliability Co-efficient was then calculated using the formular:  $\alpha = \left( \frac{k}{k-1} \right) \left( 1 - \frac{\sum_{i=1}^k O_i^2}{O_{2t}} \right)$

Where :  $\alpha$  =Cronbach’s Alpha Reliability Co-efficient

K = number of items in the scale.

Q2i = Variance of scores on item i across subjects and

Q2t = Variance of total scores across subjects where the total score for each respondent represent the sum of the individual item scores.

The result obtained from the questionnaire gave a Cronbach Alpha reliability of 0.78 or above for each of the variables used. This implies that the instrument had a strong reliability.

### 1.8 Results

Descriptive statistical method was used for the data presentation, while the Chi-square( $X^2$ ) was used in testing hypotheses. A total of 328 questionnaire copies were distributed, out of which 322 were properly filled and returned by the respondents for the study.

**Table 1: Respondents’ answers to the question “product quality is the focus of all agro based SMEs in Aba.”**

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Strongly agree	107	33.2	33.2	33.2
Agree	118	36.6	36.6	69.9
Valid Undecided	19	5.9	5.9	75.8
Disagree	27	8.4	8.4	84.2
Strongly disagree	51	15.8	15.8	100.0
Total	322	100.0	100.0	

**Table 2: Respondents' response to: Product quality enhances output of agro based product in Aba.**

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid Strongly agree	74	23.0	23.0	23.0
Agree	140	43.5	43.5	66.5
Undecided	58	18.0	18.0	84.5
Disagree	27	8.4	8.4	92.9
Strongly disagree	23	7.1	7.1	100.0
Total	322	100.0	100.0	

**Table 3: Respondents' response to: Product quality encourages demand for agro based products in Aba.**

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid Strongly agree	88	27.3	27.3	27.3
Agree	117	36.3	36.3	63.7
Undecided	51	15.8	15.8	79.5
Disagree	40	12.4	12.4	91.9
Strongly disagree	26	8.1	8.1	100.0
Total	322	100.0	100.0	

**Table 4: Respondents response to: Product quality is a critical component for production of agro based products in Aba**

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid Strongly agree	101	31.4	31.4	31.4
Agree	111	34.5	34.5	65.8
Undecided	20	6.2	6.2	72.0
Disagree	49	15.2	15.2	87.3
Strongly disagree	41	12.7	12.7	100.0
Total	322	100.0	100.0	

**Table 5: Distribution of Respondents by their response to: Agro-based products in Aba have good image in the market.**

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid Strongly agree	118	36.6	36.6	36.6
Agree	98	30.4	30.4	67.1
Undecided	37	11.5	11.5	78.6
Disagree	34	10.6	10.6	89.1
Strongly disagree	35	10.9	10.9	100.0
Total	322	100.0	100.0	

**Table 6: Distribution of Respondents by their response to: Agro based product in aba is consistent with the need of customers.**

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid Strongly agree	76	23.6	23.6	23.6
Agree	128	39.8	39.8	63.4
Undecided	32	9.9	9.9	73.3
Disagree	25	7.8	7.8	81.1
Strongly disagree	61	18.9	18.9	100.0
Total	322	100.0	100.0	

**Table 7: Distribution of Respondents by their response to: Agro based products' image in Aba give good impression to customers**

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid Strongly agree	126	39.1	39.1	39.1
Agree	90	28.0	28.0	67.1
Undecided	30	9.3	9.3	76.4
Disagree	41	12.7	12.7	89.1
Strongly disagree	35	10.9	10.9	100.0
Total	322	100.0	100.0	

**Table 8: Respondents response to the effect of product images in Aba on the marketing of agro products to customers**

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid Strongly agree	92	28.6	28.6	28.6
Agree	123	38.2	38.2	66.8
Undecided	38	11.8	11.8	78.6
Disagree	36	11.2	11.2	89.8
Strongly disagree	33	10.2	10.2	100.0
Total	322	100.0	100.0	

**Table 9: Respondents' views on the effect of Product packaging on sales of agro based products in Aba**

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid Strongly agree	125	38.8	38.8	38.8
Agree	122	37.9	37.9	76.7
Undecided	16	5.0	5.0	81.7
Disagree	31	9.6	9.6	91.3
Strongly disagree	28	8.7	8.7	100.0
Total	322	100.0	100.0	

**Table 10: Respondents’ views on: Product packaging protects agro products from damage**

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid Strongly agree	77	23.9	23.9	23.9
Agree	127	39.4	39.4	63.4
Undecided	45	14.0	14.0	77.3
Disagree	51	15.8	15.8	93.2
Strongly disagree	22	6.8	6.8	100.0
Total	322	100.0	100.0	

**Test of Hypotheses**

**Hypotheses One**

**H<sub>01</sub>:** Product quality strategy does not significantly affect performance of agro-based small and medium scale enterprises in Aba, Abia State.

**H<sub>a1</sub>:** Product quality strategy significantly affects performance of agro-based small and medium scale enterprises in Aba, Abia State.

**Table 11: Product Quality**

	Observed N	Expected N	Residual
4.00	2	24.8	-22.8
5.00	8	24.8	-16.8
6.00	32	24.8	7.2
7.00	24	24.8	-.8
8.00	49	24.8	24.2
9.00	45	24.8	20.2
10.00	49	24.8	24.2
11.00	51	24.8	26.2
12.00	29	24.8	4.2
13.00	16	24.8	-8.8
14.00	7	24.8	-17.8
15.00	7	24.8	-17.8
16.00	3	24.8	-21.8
Total	322		

Independent variable: Showing chi-square test on effect of product strategies and performance of agro-based SMEs in Aba, Abia State.

**Table 12: Performance**

	Observed N	Expected N	Residual
4.00	3	24.8	-21.8
5.00	5	24.8	-19.8
6.00	39	24.8	14.2
7.00	29	24.8	4.2
8.00	29	24.8	4.2
9.00	32	24.8	7.2
10.00	40	24.8	15.2
11.00	58	24.8	33.2
12.00	40	24.8	15.2
13.00	30	24.8	5.2
14.00	9	24.8	-15.8
15.00	3	24.8	-21.8
17.00	5	24.8	-19.8
Total	322		

Dependent variable

**Table 13: Test Statistics**

	Product quality	Performance
Chi-Square	174.584 <sup>a</sup>	156.012 <sup>a</sup>
Df	12	12
Asymp. Sig.	.000	.000

a. 0 cells (0.0%) have expected frequencies less than 5. The minimum expected cell frequency is 24.8.

### Interpretation

The tables above represent the chi-square ( $X^2$ ) result showing the significance of product quality and the performance of agro-based SMEs in Aba. The result indicates that product quality as strategy has a significant impact on the performance of agro-based firms operating in Aba. The summary of the test statistics show that Chi-square value of 174.584 and 156 values in both variables are higher than the table value as represented by Asymp. Sig. values of .000 in in both variables.

### Hypothesis Two

**H<sub>02</sub>:** Product image strategy does not significantly enhance the performance of agro based small and medium scale enterprises in Aba, Abia State.

**H<sub>a2</sub>:** Product image strategy significantly enhance the performance of agro based small and medium scale enterprises in Aba, Abia State.

**Table 14: Product Image**

	Observed N	Expected N	Residual
4.00	5	20.1	-15.1
5.00	12	20.1	-8.1
6.00	53	20.1	32.9
7.00	29	20.1	8.9
8.00	34	20.1	13.9
9.00	43	20.1	22.9
10.00	45	20.1	24.9
11.00	21	20.1	.9
12.00	20	20.1	-.1
13.00	26	20.1	5.9
14.00	7	20.1	-13.1
15.00	6	20.1	-14.1
16.00	13	20.1	-7.1
17.00	3	20.1	-17.1
19.00	1	20.1	-19.1
20.00	4	20.1	-16.1
Total	322		

Independent variable: Showing chi-square test on effect of product image on the performance of agro-based small and medium scale enterprises in Aba, Abia State.

**Table 15: Performance**

	Observed N	Expected N	Residual
4.00	3	24.8	-21.8
5.00	5	24.8	-19.8
6.00	39	24.8	14.2
7.00	29	24.8	4.2
8.00	29	24.8	4.2
9.00	32	24.8	7.2
10.00	40	24.8	15.2
11.00	58	24.8	33.2
12.00	40	24.8	15.2
13.00	30	24.8	5.2
14.00	9	24.8	-15.8
15.00	3	24.8	-21.8
17.00	5	24.8	-19.8
Total	322		

dependent variable.

**Table 16: Test Statistics**

	Product image	Performance
Chi-Square	206.994 <sup>a</sup>	156.012 <sup>b</sup>
Df	15	12
Asymp. Sig.	.000	.000

- a. 0 cells (0.0%) have expected frequencies less than 5. The minimum expected cell frequency is 20.1.
- b. 0 cells (0.0%) have expected frequencies less than 5. The minimum expected cell frequency is 24.8.

### Interpretation

The tables above represent the chi Square result showing the significance of Product image and the performance of Agro Based SME in Aba. The result indicates that product image as strategy has a significant impact on the performance of Agro Based firms operating in Aba. The summary of the test statistics show that Chi-square value of 174.584 and 156 values in both variables are higher than the table values as represented Asymp. Sig of .000 values.

### Hypothesis Three

**H<sub>03</sub>:** Product branding strategy does not significantly affect the performance of agro based small and medium scale enterprises in Aba, Abia State.

**H<sub>a3</sub>:** Product branding strategy significantly affects the performance of agro based small and medium scale enterprises in Aba, Abia State.

### Regression

Model Summary showing the effect of Product branding and the performance of agro-based SMEs in ABA.

**Table 17:**

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.307 <sup>a</sup>	.094	.083	2.51030

- a. Predictors: (Constant), product branding makes acquiring new customers in aba easy, product branding increases the value of agro based products in the market., product branding encourages recognition of agro based products from Aba., product branding makes agro based products in aba unique.

**Table 18: ANOVA<sup>a</sup>**

Model		Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	208.459	4	52.115	8.270	.000 <sup>b</sup>
	Residual	1997.603	317	6.302		
	Total	2206.062	321			

a. Dependent Variable: performance

b. Predictors: (Constant), product branding makes acquiring new customers in aba easy. Product branding increases the value of agro-based products in the market. Product branding encourages recognition of agro based products from Aba. Product branding makes agro-based products in aba unique.

**Table 19: Coefficients<sup>a</sup>**

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	T	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	9.943	.687		14.474	.000
	product branding makes agrobased products in Aba unique.	.190	.109	.109	1.739	.083
	product branding encourages recognition of agrobased products from Aba.	.105	.114	.051	.927	.355
	product branding increases the value of agrobased products in the market.	.101	.109	.050	.930	.353
	product branding makes acquiring new customers in Aba easy.	-.436	.117	-.239	-3.734	.000

a. Dependent Variable: performance

b. All requested variables entered.

### Interpretation

The table above shows that the model was able to predict the relationship between the two variables in the model being that F-statistics was less than .005. The R values was 31 percent which indicate a weak relationship between product branding and the Performance of Agro based SMEs. The R-Square values shows only 10 percent contribution of the independent variable to the dependent variable. This implies that branding of Agro based products in Aba is not a major contributor to sales performance of the products.

The coefficient of the T-test statistics show that product branding and Uniqueness has a t value of 1.73 and significance .08 > p-value of .005, product branding and recognition has a T-statistics of .92 and a significance of .335 > p-value of .005, product branding and increment in value has t-statistics of .93 and a significance of .33 > p. value of .005 and lastly branding and acquisition of new customers has a t- value of -3.734 and a significance of .000. In summary the individual contribution of each variable to the models were insignificant.

### Hypothesis Four

**H<sub>01</sub>:** Product packaging strategy does not significantly affect the performance of agro-based small and medium scale enterprises in Aba, Abia State.

**Table 20: Model Summary**

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.618 <sup>a</sup>	.382	.375	2.07306

- a. Predictors: (Constant), Agrobased product in aba perform well in the market., product packaging sales agro based products in aba, product packaging makes agrobased products in aba attractive., product packaging protects agro products from damage.

**Table 22: ANOVA<sup>a</sup>**

Model		Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	843.728	4	210.932	49.082	.000 <sup>b</sup>
	Residual	1362.334	317	4.298		
	Total	2206.062	321			

- a. Dependent Variable: performance

- b. Predictors: (Constant), product packaging sales agro based products in aba., product packaging makes agrobased products in aba attractive., product packaging protects agro products from damage.

**Table 23: Coefficients<sup>a</sup>**

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	T	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	5.500	.381		14.440	.000
	product packaging sales agro based products in aba	.395	.100	.190	3.964	.000
	product packaging protects agro products from damage.	.175	.108	.080	1.623	.106
	product packaging makes agrobased products in aba attractive.	.039	.097	.019	.400	.690

- a. Dependent Variable: performance

**Interpretation**

The table above shows that the model was able to predict the relationship between the two variables in the model being that F-statistics was less than .005. The R values was 61 percent which indicate a very strong relationship between product packaging and the Performance of Agro based SMEs. The R-Square values shows 39 percent contribution of the independent variable to the dependent variable. This implies that product packaging of agro based products in Aba is a major contributor to sales performance of the products. The remaining 61 percent unaccounted for in the model is an extraneous variable not considered in the model.

The coefficient of the T- test statistics show that product packaging and sales has a t value of 3.96 and significance .000 < p value of .005, this implies that packaging made a significant

contribution to the model. All other individual contribution of the predictors were insignificant because their T – statistics were > p-value of .005

### **1.9 Discussion of findings**

Result number one revealed that there is a significant relationship between product quality and the performance of agro-based small and medium scale enterprises in Aba, Abia State. It shows that product quality has an effect on the performance of agro-based products. In other words, a quality product attracts customers. Quality is one of the determinant factors that affect customers' buying decision of agro-based products because quality is the characteristics of a product or service that bear on its ability to satisfy stated or implied customer needs (Kotler & Armstrong, 2012). Elements of product quality product performance of its expected functions, reliability, durability, and precision, among other things.

These product attributes attract a customer to purchase the product. Quality adds value to a product and also encourages performance. If a product fulfils the customers' expectations, the customer will be pleased and consider the product to be acceptable. A quality product sells itself. As noted by (Ozo, 2005), customers prefer products having the right or high level of quality. Quality product also encourages repeat purchase (Mogaba, 2017). When a product has the required quality, irrespective of the price, customers will look for it. Product quality among other things gives satisfaction to customers.

Result number two shows there's a significant relationship between product image and the performance of agro-based small and medium-scale enterprises in Aba. People relate with organizations based on the information they have about the organization. Customers' perceptions and opinion are formed based on the information about a product available to them. It implies that image has a lot to do with information management. The steady flows of relevant information to the public help shape and build their impression and knowledge about products or services. The study by Howard (2010) agrees with this result by saying that "a good image deserves a proper presentation". It represents customers' feelings and expectation about a product. In other words, proper presentation of agro-based products to the customers will build the impression and knowledge they have about the product and this will enable the SMEs to achieve optimum performance. Also, from the findings, good image of agro-based products will promote sales and increase patronage of the agro-based product only if the products can win the perceptual interest of the customers because customers are moved by what they see and how it is being presented to them. The result of this findings also indicate that customers will always patronize a product with good image. In table 4.6, 36.6percent of the respondent strongly agreed that agro-based products have good image in Aba. It is enough to say that there is a significant relationship between product image and performance of agro-based SMEs in Aba.

#### **4.4.3 Product branding and the performance of agro-based small and medium scale enterprises in Aba, Abia State.**

The result of the findings show that there is no significant relationship between branding and the performance of agro-based small and medium scale enterprises in Aba, Abia State. The R-Square values shows only 10 percent contribution of the independent variable to the dependent variable. The result of the finding reveals that branding of agro based products is not a major contributor to sales performance of agro-based small and medium scale enterprises in Aba. Product branding can be augmented to other product strategies. For instance, some of the agro-based products such as palm kernel seed (PKS) and palm kernel oil (PKO) have already been known by the customers who may want to use them in further production. Branding though increases the sales, but if a product or service experiences is negative, it could be attached to the brand. What the customer will rather look up for will be the quality of the products, considering if the product could enable him to produce another quality product that can perform well in the market.

#### **4.4.4 Product packaging and the performance of agro-based SMEs in Aba, Abia State.**

The result of the findings show that there is a significant relationship between product packaging and the performance of agro-based small and medium scale enterprises in Aba, Abia State. Product packaging increases the opportunity of the products to be appreciated by the customers, this is because most customer buy package not the product itself. As supported by (Nawaz et al.,2012) Packaging is often the last impression the consumer or consumer will have of your products before that final purchase decision is made.This was confirmed by (Mogaba,2015) that neat and alluring packaging works as a brand enhancer and identifier to attract more customers because most customers buy package due to its' aesthetic look. Packaging provides information about product usage and other necessary information regarding the use of the product. From table 4.14, 38.8percent of the respondents strongly agree that product packaging has a significant effect on the performance of agro-based small and medium scale enterprises. Many customers more especially those that buys industrial goods prefer products with durable and neat packaging because most of the products travel very far to the place where they are being used.

The finding also discovered that attractive packaging changes the perception of customers about a product. It gives confidence and trust to the product which will also encourage the customers to buy more of the product by so doing, the product will perform well in the market. The study also discovered that agro-based product can perform well in the highly competitive market if it is well packaged considering the type of packaging the customer wants because most customers will like to go for a product that has the package that can be recycled and used by the company for other production. In contribution to more knowledge about product strategies and performance of ASMEs and in literature, agro-based SMEs in Aba should offer quality products that has good image and alluring packaging which can act as a brand enhancer in other to increase the patronage of their products by customer both locally and internationally.

#### **1.10 Summary of Findings**

The research was undertaken to study effect of product strategies and the performance of agro-based small and enterprises (ASMEs) in Aba, Abia State. The aim of the study was to examine the effect of product quality strategy, product image strategy, product branding strategy, and product packaging strategy and the performance of agro-based SMEs in Aba, Abia State. The findings were as follows.

1. Product quality strategy has a significant relationship with the performance of agro-based small and medium scale enterprises in Aba, Abia State. Customers would like to buy or go for quality agro-based products.
2. Product image strategy has a significant relationship with the performance of agro-based small and medium scale enterprises in Aba, Abia State. Customer would prefer to buy agro-based products that has good image which represents the posture, outlook or the mental picture created and upheld by the public about the product.
3. Product branding strategy has no significant relationship with the performance of agro-based small and medium scale enterprises in Aba, Abia State. Customers are not very interested in the brand of agro-based products offered to them by the ASMEs because branding is not a major contributor to sales performance of the products rather, it can be added to other product strategies.
4. Product packaging has a significant relationship with the performance of agro-based small and medium scale enterprises in Aba, Abia State. With numerous functions of packaging, such as protecting and preventing the product from damage, customers would prefer to buy products with quality packaging because agro-based products are industrial products that would need to be transported to the places where there are used in further production.

### **1.11 Conclusion**

The following conclusions were made after a careful study of the literature reviewed and the research findings that, there is a need to patronize agro-based products in Aba and Nigeria as a whole because it will encourage the small and medium scale enterprises which contribute about 75% to the development of the economy and about 54% to the GDP and employs over 54 million skilled and unskilled labour in the country. Users of agro-based products should make a continuous and conscious effort in patronizing agro-based products in other to generate more investment that has the capacity to improve Nigeria economy.

Product quality is an important strategy that has effect on the performance of agro-based small and medium scale enterprises (ASMEs) in Aba, Abia State. Users of agro-based products will prefer quality products which could help them produce other that can stand the taste of time and compete favorably in the market.

Product image strategy is very crucial in the management of every business. Product image has effect on the performance of agro-based small and medium scale enterprises (ASMEs) in Aba, Abia State, because customers' perceptions and opinions are formed based on acquired knowledge which is anchored on the available information about a product.

Product branding strategy has no effect on the performance of agro-based small and medium scale enterprises (ASMEs) in Aba, Abia State. Brand simply denote ownership and identifies companies products from others. It makes it easy for customers to identify the product that they want and so enhances customer identification of company's products from others.

Product packaging strategy has effect on the performance of agro-based small and medium scale enterprises (ASMEs) in Aba, Abia State. Customers appreciate packaging. It gives confidence and information concerning a product and makes it easy for carriage. It protects the product from damage and so encourage patronage which increases performance of agro-based products in Aba, Abia State.

Agro-based products are very important raw materials for industries. Small and medium scale enterprises (ASMEs) in Aba, Abia State should improve the product quality to encourage customers in other to perform well in the market.

### **1.12 Recommendations**

The following recommendations are made following the research findings:

Manufacturers:

1. Quality agro-based products should be the focus. Customer that uses the products requires quality products in other to compete favorably with others in the market.
2. Effective image management is crucial to business organizations. Agro-based small and medium scale enterprises should effectively manage the image of the products in other to present a formidable picture of the product to the customer for improved performance.
3. Agro-based products should be packaged to communicate value of the product to the customers.

Government:

4. Nigerian government should formulate and implement suitable and appropriate policies that will help the agro-based SMEs Aba, Abia State to produce and maintain quality of their products.
5. Government should encourage the patronage of agro-based products in Nigeria and discourage the dependence on foreign products in other to increase the gross domestic product(GDP) and create more employment in the country.
6. Government should support the ASMEs, by financing the entrepreneurs to create more capital for investment.

7. Government should create enabling environment for the ASMEs to operate in other to grow the economy.

Customers and the public:

8. Customers should be properly guided on the use of the product this will help to bring out the quality and value of the product to the ultimate consumers.
9. Customers should encourage the agro-based entrepreneurs to match their offerings with the quality to improve their performance.
10. This study is inconclusive. The researcher recommend more finding on product strategies including marketing variables such as market promotion, product advertising among others, to improve the performance of the ASMEs in Aba, Abia State.

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