Supply Chain Integration and Business Performance in the Telecommunication Industry in Nigeria

Didia J. U. D[#1], N. Gladson Nwokah[#2]

[#1]Department of Marketing, Faculty of Management Sciences
Rivers State University of Science and Technology, Port Harcourt, Nigeria
Didia.james@ust.edu.ng

[#2]Department of Marketing, Faculty of Management Sciences
Rivers State University of Science and Technology, Port Harcourt, Nigeria
Nwokah.gladson@ust.edu.ng

Abstract - The purpose of this explanatory research is to evaluate the association between supply chain integration and business performance in the telecommunication industry in Nigeria. This study used a structured questionnaire to elicit responses from respondents from the Telecommunication firms in Nigeria. Returned copies of questionnaire were analyzed using both descriptive and inferential statistics. Descriptive statistics was used to determine the mean and standard deviation of the distribution, while the Spearman rank order correlation co-efficient was used to ascertain the associations between the supply chain integration and the dimensions of business performance in the telecommunication firms in Nigeria. The results of the study reported herein, shows that supply chain integration associates with business performance in the Nigeria Telecommunication firms. It is the recommendation of this paper that managers of Nigerian Telecommunication firms should strengthen their practice of supply chain Integration strategy as a paradigm shift from the isolated functional dependence. The study reported in this paper can be carried out in other industry; and also, in other culture to ascertain whether the same, similar or different outcomes can be achieved.

Keywords: *supply-chain, integration, business performance, marketing, telecommunication.*

1 *Introduction*

Organizations world over, Nigeria inclusive, grapple with the choice of requisite strategy to increase performance and mitigate the damning consequences of poor performance that leads to loss of market share, limited or no sales growth, customer dissatisfaction, lack of profit, redundancy and to unfavourable Gross Domestic Product Position. In the 1960s and 1970s, functionalized marketing was an adequate response adopted by organizations in meeting operational challenges [10]. And it is interesting to note that this functionalized structure which evolved because of changes in the market place has instead become its victim [35]. This development means that functionalized marketing as a strategy in the value creating process has failed to produce the required outcomes [10]. This is more so because of heightened vulnerability of businesses due to competition, conflicts, uncertainties, regional insurgencies etc, across the globe which mitigates business performance. Poor business performance obviously has weakening and terminal effects on the operations of organizations and might lead to loss of market share, limited or no sales growth, customer dissatisfaction, lack of profit, redundancy, reduction in cash flow, and cumulatively to unfavourable Gross Domestic Product (GDP).

The Nigerian business environment is not devoid of these challenges that mitigate effective business performance especially in the telecommunication industry. The effects of poor performance will be particularly dismal for the telecommunication industry in Nigeria due to the intense and cut-throat competition that exists in the industry. The problems of poor performance in the telecommunication industry include; customer service delivery deficiency, network switching, reduction in tariffs, rising sales promotion cost, frequent and costly innovation [3] and these have the potency of affecting the National Telecommunication Infrastructure. Many problems already constrain the performance of Nigerian.

Telecommunication industry, include rising cost of energy, free fall in tariffs and sometimes outright stoppage of telecommunication operations. At the firm level there are low customer patronage, lack of customer satisfaction, low market share, low profit margins, fraud, depreciating value of assets, poor return on investment and weak innovation (idea generation, development and implementation).

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Some of these problems were responsible for the recent sanctioning of MTN, GLO and Airtel by NCC for poor service quality [6]

These problems have given credence to the call for a change in strategy (Long and Churn, 2004) from functionalized marketing to Total Integrated Marketing [10]. According to [5] in the face of environmental challenges and upheavals, businesses can only increase their ability to effectively adapt and build competitive edge by going horizontal, by flattening their organizations, breaking down barriers between functions and stimulating more team work between functional areas. Functionalized marketing has proved a failure in meeting these operational challenges. Previous studies on inter-functional integration and cross-functional integration by [10], [6] and [5] were done in US, Brazil and France respectively and have not been replicated in Nigerian business environment with the same or different outcomes; thus creating a knowledge gap.

Therefore the question this study sets out to answer is, to what extent can business performance be effectively achieved or improved in association with Total integrated Marketing in the Nigerian Telecommunication Industry. Thus, the purpose of the study reported in this paper is to empirically investigate the association between Suplly chain integration and Business Performance in the Nigerian telecommunication industry.

2 Literature Review

Supply chain management (SCM) is all the activities that take place to get a product in your hands – from the time of raw materials extraction to the minute you pull out your credit card and take the final product home. Supply chain management (SCM) represents an effort by suppliers to develop and implement supply chains that are as efficient and economical as possible. Supply chains cover everything from production, to product development, to the information systems needed to direct these undertakings.

2.1 The Concept of Supply Chain Management

The concept of supply chain management is encapsulated and explained in one sentence, producing and delivering the goods that meet consumer satisfaction. The interface between marketing and operation is such that marketing efforts goad consumers toward benefit/value expectations that products will provide while supply chain constitute the actual driving force in delivering the expectations and values. The task of this integration is accentuated by customers demand for increased value, rapid response, and tailored solutions [10]

The marketing/supply chain integration helps to resolve this task. [28] suggests that “supply chain capabilities are likely to play a large part in; reducing costs and thus impacting on price, determining the speed of availability of the product to the customer; influencing the degree of product customization possible; impacting on customer choices; capturing and sharing information with suppliers and customers, and negotiating initial aspects of the relationship with distributors and key accounts”. As evidenced from [28] point of view, the interface between marketing and supply chain is imperative in optimizing and delivering value that will eventually conduce to greater business performance. Ref. [10] note that “lean enterprise and integrated supply chains are changing business practices in industries as diverse as computers, airlines, health care, and groceries. We are only beginning to grasp the impact of these developments on customer value let alone what they mean for the supply chain interface”. Thus the impact of supply chain integration on customer value delivery is of strategic import. Marketing discovers the benefit/value expectations of consumers from a product while it takes supply chain and the entire supply chain system to deliver these values and expectations. Optimal benefit is derived from the ensuing integration when measures are taken to match supply with demand, the reason that gave rise to the development of supply chain research discipline ab-initio.

In the traditional view of supply chain, the problem is manufacturing and delivering products on time. However, this view has given way to a new focus on creating a whole new way of doing business. According to [10] “the interface between marketing processes, supply chain, and supply chain systems is not simply a one Way Street for keeping marketing promises through enhanced product and service quality. The challenge is just as much about moving with new business models created by integrated supply chains based on inter-organizational collaboration. The need for a market-based philosophy to penetrate supply chain design is critical: total integrated marketing now spans the supply chain, not just the company”. The suggestion above seems to provide the panacea to improved supply chain and logistics systems, i.e. the concept of total integrated marketing. As the chairman of Uniliver, Niall Fitzgerald, once noted, today’s consumers wants the product where he wants, when he wants it nothing else will do. The firm’s ability to cope in delivering this customer’s requirements depends, to a great extent, on the quality of its supply chain and logistics systems.

It is only when there is a seamless integration of sales, marketing; supply chain, logistics, and customer service that we can expect to deliver the product, where the customer wants it, when he wants it [10] It is however noted that some companies are still astonishingly elusive to this aspiration, despite the fact that it has been central to the success of such diverse group of firms as Singapore Airlines, Amazon.com, Dell computer, and FedEx. Additionally, changes in information technology and better understanding of cost economics are revolutionizing supply chain management and optimizing benefits there from.

In all, the supply chain interface is seem from extant literature as impacting positively on organization performance. [28] has aptly noted that "a major source of competitive advantage comes from the combination of supply chain advantage with marketing/brand advantage… but supply chain strength that is not linked to marketing/brand advantage leaves us competing on price and availability and fighting to hold onto the cheap generic position in the market". Therefore a proper inter-functional linkage between marketing and supply chain leads to improvement in business performance. This improvement in business performance is more evidenced in the interaction between production/manufacturing and marketing. [2] posit that "a close relationship between marketing and production units is a key requirement for improving business performance". It is further conjectured that collaboration between the two may result in available communication, which in turn, can enhance customer satisfaction and business profits and lack of collaboration between marketing and production may indeed create conflict and have a negative impact on the performance of companies [2]. In this regard, [2], had observed a natural tension between marketing and operation/logistics systems. It is noted that at worst, this tension leads to a rift between the two functions that prohibits any integration of goals and leaves consumers poorly served. However, companies that manage this integration well tend to outperform companies in which a rift exist [5], [4] identified that the integration along the company's value chain is related positively to business performance.

To be certain, the value chain of our description is essentially reflected in the supply chain management (SCM). And SCM involves the integration of the functions of logistics, marketing and manufacturing [3] whereas logistic/supply chain tasks require the integration of information, transportation, inventory, warehousing, handling and packaging with the aim of making raw materials and goods promptly available to their desired destination [7]. It has been observed that the close collaboration between marketing and production/manufacturing is a key requirement for improving business performance which are evidenced in enhanced customer satisfaction and increased business profits [8] Studies that show the impact of marketing integration with operation/manufacturing on organizations performance are legion [5]

Other studies that show a high performance achievement through cross functional integration include, [9], [11] have equally shown a positive relationship between supply chain, business performance and marketing and manufacturing integration. [13] in his study identified better performance when companies seek higher levels of manufacturing and marketing integration. Superior performance as identified in this study manifest in increased sales and higher profit. Evidently, extant literature has identified the existence of this phenomenon. This study is interested in replicating this evidence in our environment.

2.2 The Concept of Business Performance

The dependent variable of this study is business performance which in our view is predicted by Total Integrated marketing. It is a construct that helps to determine the well-being and status of firm and requires a multidimensional scale in its measurement because it involves multidiscipline and cross functional aspects of the organization [22]. Performance measurement is described as a process of organizational processes and applications designed to optimize the execution of business strategy [22]. The essence of this excursive is to check on the outcome of strategy implementation and appraisal to identify areas of improvements.

There are scholarly opinions in the evaluation of business performance. Nwokah and Maclayton [23] suggest that business performance is the achievement of financial and operational business goals. Business performance helps to determine the status of an organization as compared to its competitors. Several indicators are used in knowing the performance status of a firm. Business achievements or attributes are identified as strong financial result satisfied customers and employees, high levels of individual initiative, productivity and innovation, aligned performance measurement and reward systems. [30] used ROI, sales growth and market share in the evaluation of market performance.

In their work, [22] argued that the current business performance is operationalized by 12 items notably, sales growth, customer retention, ROI, market share, getting important and valuable information, ability to obtain bank, ability to obtain better terms in loan, ability to obtain governmental approval, shorten the time for governmental approval, contact with important persons, ability to secure local resources (electricity, human resources) and lastly motivating employees. These away of suggested indicators leave the issue of performance measures open ended. The Nigerian Telecommunication industry is ridden with competition. This study therefore used market share and sales growth as business performance metrics in the Nigeria telecommunication industry.

Business Performance is a construct that helps to determine the status of an organization as compared to its competitors. Performance is defined as the act of performing; of doing some things; using knowledge as distinguished from merely possessing it, and any recognized achievement [27]. [29] Suggest that performance can refer to either the ‘ends’ (results) or the ‘means’ (actions) that produced the ends. Profit, which is an ends performance, is seen as historic in nature because it occurs before being reported. [31] used Return on Investment (ROI), sales growth and market share as measures of Business Performance. Equally, [24] that a current business performance measures includes 12 items viz; sales growth, customer retention, return on investment, market share, getting important and valuable information, ability to obtain loan, ability to obtain governmental approval, contact with important persons, ability to secure local resources and motivation.

From the long list above, it appears there is no agreement or end to business performance indicators. However, suffice it to say that Business Performance can be finance-based (profits): market-based (market share) or a combination of these. In the same vein [33] opine that business performance is the achievement of financial and operational business goals. In line with these views, we are considering organizational profits and market share as indicators of business performance in the TIM construct of Nigeria Telecommunication Industry because, ultimately, market share and profit seem to be prime indicators of organizational success and performance.

2.2.1 Sales Growth

Sales growth is described as a very strong indicator of marketing and thereby business performance. The competitiveness of business organizations are evaluated by the rate of sales growth. Innovations or inventions impact on profits positively via sales growth. Sales growth therefore is particularly a meaningful indicator of the financial performance of a firm [28]. Sales growth is achieved by annual addition to previous sales figures. Precisely, the amount of a company derives from sales compared to a previous, corresponding period of time in which the latter sales exceed the former. However this increment may or may not be equally. In a general note how, it indicates a relative measure of changes in sales over recorded periods. These periods are either affected by price or volume or both. Other controllable or uncontrollable factors may affect variation in sales figures e.g. seasonal variations, income level, quality, changes in taste, changes in technology, company’s values etc.

2.2.2 Market Share

Market share is the percentage or proportion of the total available market or market segment that is being served by a company. McGrath and Micheal [19] argued that “market share is a subset of a market formed by the supply/demand equilibrium for the marketer’s specific offering and the level or incidence of market access created by the marketer’s distribution channels for that offering and the level of incidence of market recognition (awareness) of a given marketer and/or that marketer’s distribution channels as a source of supply for the said offering.” Market share is indeed the share of the industry’s market potential that is retained by a firm in that industry. It is expressed by the proportion of the market that the firm is able to capture [19]. It equally expresses the company’s sales revenue realized from that market, or as a company’s unit sales volume (in a market) divided by total volume of units sold in that market stated as:

$$\text{Market Share} = \frac{Firm's\ Sales}{Total\ Market\ Share}$$

Market share is adjudged one of the best measures of business performance because it abstracts from industry-wide micro-environmental variables [26]. Other measures include economies of scale, ROI, ROA, profit, sales growth, reputation and increased bargaining power.

While retaining customers, [25] suggests three ways to follow in increasing market share viz: tailor products, prices and packaging for major customer segments; the management structure of the organization must change so that regional executives play a larger role in responding to local markets and major customer segments; and separate brand families when distribution models are deployed to serve specific segments of the markets. Market share as a measure of business performance is achieved mostly through customer satisfaction and retention. For this to happen, [24] suggests the following; reinforced customer loyalty by making present customer feel they are part of the business, providing a focal point of differentiation and thus giving prospective customers a reason to choose their brand; optimizing media presence so that the effect of our total communication programmes are greater, and finally brand image should motivate the company and stakeholders. The overview of the Nigeria telecommunication is discussed next.

2.2.3 Telecommunication

Nowadays, it is no longer news that access to and the effectiveness of telecommunication infrastructure enhances business performance. On a micro level, firms are known to have leveraged on telecommunications to build global business empires and at the national level there is a causal link between good telecommunication and economic growth. Telecommunication is the science and technology of sending and receiving information such as sound, visual images or computer data over long distances through the use of electrical, radio, or light signals, using electronic devices to encode the information as signals and to decode the signals as information [34] It also means communication between parties at a distance from one another especially by the use of telephone. The telecom solution expert [35] defines it as the transmission of information, as words, sounds, or images, usually over great distances, in the form of electromagnetic signals, as by telegraph, telephone, radio, or television. This capability of transmitting or communicating at a distance has made telecommunication an imperative for successful business operation. It is indispensable in negotiating and acquiring inbound resources and moving outbound goods and services. A business needs to communicate with all its publics for different purposes and reasons to remain relevant. The next section discusses the methods and findings of this study.

3. The Case Study

This explanatory study adopted a correlational type of investigation to ascertain the association between supply chain integration and business performance in a non-contrived setting. The unit of analysis was the different units/departments of all the telecommunication firms in Nigeria. This cross-sectional survey had a minimal interference with the process of the study [1], [26]

The study sample is made up of the major Global System for Mobil communication(GSM) network providers operating on the 900/1800 MHz spectrum, viz; MTN Nigeria, Globacom, Etisalat, and Airtel, [34, 35]. According to the Front Desk Officer at NCC, these major companies have spectrum specific frequencies and enjoy separate dialing, large market base, different services, and wider reach which in all provide them with distinctive competitive edge. Other minor operators use Code Division Multiple Access, (CDMAs), which employs engineering technique known as Multiplex,(that allows a group of firms to run signals using common channels) in serving their Niches. Bearing in mind that not all category of workers of these major companies are intellectually and officially qualified to understand and attend to the research instrument because some of the issues require knowledge of strategic decisions, the sample elements comprised all the managers or units heads of the 28 departments/basic work units, of the four (4) major and functional telecommunication companies in Nigeria.

In this study structured questionnaire was used as the source of the primary data. The preference for this method is hinged on the survey design of this study. Copies of questionnaire were therefore distributed to the 28 units/ department heads of the four, (4) major telecommunication firms. The unit/department heads are deemed appropriate because of the strategic content of the instrument which could only be responded to by the unit heads because of their positions in the firms.

3.1 Reliability

The study instrument was adapted from [16, 17]. For domestication, the instrument was further subjected to test through academic scrutiny and pilot study. The instrument was further subjected to reliability test with the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 20.0 with a thresh hold of 0.7 Cronbach Alpha set by [21]. Table 1 shows the reliability results of the variables

Table 1 Reliability test of supply chain integration and business performance.

Supply Chain Integration	0.849
Sales Growth	0.765
Market Share	0.744

Source: SPSS 20.0 outputs based on 2014 field survey data

As can be seen in Table 1, all the dimensions used in this study are reliable and thus, are used for further statistical analysis.

4 Findings with Descriptive Statistics

The descriptive analysis of supply chain integration is expressed in five items questions. The descriptive study of the five items is discussed next.

Table 2 Supply chain Integration.

S/N	Items	Mean	Std. Dev.
1	My firm has a well-developed and vital supply chain outfit that leverage on its marketing interface to deliver on cooperate obligations.	4.85	.366
2	The integration between marketing and supply chain management is imperative in optimizing and delivering value that will conduce to greater business performance.	4.85	.366
3	Marketing discovers benefit/value expectations of customers, supply chain and operation deliver the values and expectations thereby reinforcing the value of marketing/supply chain integration.	4.85	.366
4	Marketing's ability to deliver products to customers where they want it and when they want it depends on the quality of its supply chain and logistic systems	4.95	.223
5	It is understood that when there is a seamless integration of sales, marketing, supply chain, logistics and customer services that we can deliver on customer expectation.	5.00	.000

A visual inspection of the responses to the first item on supply chain integration shows that staff agreed that a well-developed and vital supply chain outfit leverages on its marketing interface to deliver on cooperative obligations. This item has a high mean score (x) of 4.85. Respondents also agreed on item two that the integration between marketing and supply chain integration is important in optimizing and delivering value that will conduce to greater business performance. Consequently, this item has a high mean score (x) of 4.85 also. Respondents affirmed that marketing discovers value expectations of consumers, while supply chain and operations deliver the value and expectations thereby reinforcing the need for marketing/supply chain integration. This item equally has a high mean score (x) of 4.85. Responding to the fourth item, on supply chain integration, respondents affirmed that when there is a seamless integration of sales, marketing, supply chain, logistics and customer services, companies deliver on customer expectations with a high mean score (x) of 4.95. An examination of the responses to item five on supply chain integration reveals that respondents were of the opinion that marketing's ability to deliver products to customers where they want it and where they want it depends on its supply chain and logistics system. This item has a very high mean score of 4.50.

4.1 Association between Supply Chain Integration and Business Performance

The result of the Spearman Rank Order Correlation Coefficient relating to the association between Supply Chain Integration and Business Performance is presented in table 3. The table contains the result of the statistical test of significance (p-value) which enabled us to answer the forth research question and generalize our findings to the generality of the population of study.

Table 3 Correlation Matrix for Supply Chain Integration and Business Performance

Correlations

			Supply Chain Integration	Market Share	Sales Growth
Spearman's rho	Supply Chain Integration	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	.539*	.633**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.014	.003
		N	20	20	20
	Market Share	Correlation Coefficient	.539*	1.000	.479*
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.014	.	.033
		N	20	20	20
	Sales Growth	Correlation Coefficient	.633**	.479*	1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.003	.033	.
		N	20	20	20

*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

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

Source: Survey Data, 2014 and SPSS Version 20 statistical output

The result of the correlation analysis in table 3 shows that there is a significant association between customer chain integration and market share and sales growth. Customer service integration and market share are significantly correlated (rho = 0.539, p = 0.014 < 0.05). Supply chain integration and sales growth are equally significantly correlated (rho= .633, p = .003 < 0.05). We are inclined to infer from the foregoing that the association between customer service integration and market share and sales growth are significant.

Based on our adoption of a 95% confidence interval which implies a 0.05 level of significance we accept alternate hypotheses and state that:

There is a significant association between supply chain integration and market share. There is a significant association between supply chain integration and sales growth.

The result of the Spearman Rank Order Correlation analysis in table 3 shows a significant association between Total Integrated Marketing (TIM) dimension of supply chain integration and all the measures of business performance namely; market share and sales growth. The outcome shows that there is a significant and positive association between supply chain integration and market share ($r= .53$ $P= .014 < .05$).

Supply chain operations have become so important that its prompt delivery enhances value offerings customers desire for fulfillments and as such they dictate where, when and how these goods are delivered to them and in what manner. Supply chain integration enhances these and leads to increase in market share and business performance.

The same table 3 contains the result that shows statistically significant association between supply chain integration and sales growth ($r = .633$, $P = .003 < 0.05$). The correlation coefficient represents a moderate correlation by our scale and implies a substantial association between the dimension and sales growth. Specifically, this means that supply chain integration enhances sales growth. This indicates the apparent significance of supply chain integration in serving and delivering value to esteemed customers. From the foregoing therefore, we find that:

1. The telecommunication companies in Nigeria understand and fully appreciate that with the adoption of an effective and efficient strategy of supply chain integration, customers are served when and where they want which translates into greater market share.

2. The telecommunication companies in Nigeria fully appreciate and understand that the effective and efficient application of supply chain integration strategy, sales growth are achieved with increased customer satisfaction that accompanies the application.

On the association between supply chain integration and business performance of the Nigerian Telecommunication firms, the study found a significant and positive association. Managers of the Nigerian Telecommunication firms exhibit a strong inclination to the adoption and practice of supply chain integration strategy. This finding is strongly supported by theoretical revelations. The need for this integration is accentuated by customers demand for increased value, rapid response and tailored solutions [29] In the face of these challenges, the marketing-supply chain interface appears handy in resolving the enormous tasks. With supply chain capabilities costs are reduced which impact directly on price, speed of availability of products to customers are increased, the degree of product customization is influenced, customer choices are impacted and initial negotiations on aspects of the relationship with distributors and key accounts are started [20]. Accordingly this strategy interface is imperative in optimizing and delivering value that will conduce to greater business performance. This advantage is what the managers of Nigeria Telecommunication leverage on to make significant improvement on market share. The positive outcome of this integration strategy is observed more with the combination of supply chain advantage and marketing/brand advantage [6, 7]. Thus a proper inter-functional linkage between supply chain and marketing leads to improvement in business performance [12]

The general conjecture is that this collaboration results in available communication, which in turn, can enhance customer satisfaction and business profits and lack of collaboration may create conflict and have a negative impact on the performance of companies [7]. Market share and sales growth are positively affected when companies manage the integration of supply chain and marketing without rift [16, 17]. Furthermore, [33] observes that the integration along the company's; value chain are more productive in terms of positive business performance. Managers of the telecommunication firms appreciation of the wholesomeness and combination that constitutes the supply chain management system. The productive management of the supply chain involves the integration of the functions of logistics, marketing and manufacturing [32], whereas logistic/supply chain tasks require the integration of information, transportation, inventory, warehousing, handling and packaging with the aim of making raw materials and goods promptly available to their desired destination (customer satisfaction and increased business profits emanating from increment in sales potential [31].

In one of his celebrated studies [16] have shown positive performance outcomes between supply chain, business performance, marketing and manufacturing integration. Numerous other famous studies have demonstrated the linkage between supply chains integration and business performance generally cross functional integration and positive performance outcomes [28, 29], there is higher level of business performance when supply chain management system integrates with marketing [14, 15]. Superior often manifest in increased sales and profits. Our findings in this study are not different. Based on the foregoing, we conclude that:

1. As the managers of Nigerian Telecommunication firms adopt and practice supply chain integration strategy, their ability to increase their market share is significantly enhanced.

2. As the managers of Nigerian Telecommunication firms appreciate and practice supply chain integration strategy, their ability to increase sales is significantly enhanced.

5. Conclusions

The cardinal purpose of this study was to empirically ascertain the association between supply chain Integration and Business Performance in the Nigerian Telecommunication industry. Pursuant to this research data were appropriately gathered, hypotheses tested, findings made, conclusions drawn and implications stated. Based on these, this study recommends that the managers of Nigerian Telecommunication firms should strengthen their practice of supply chain Integration strategy as a paradigm shift from the isolated functional dependence. The marketing-sales interface facilitates the consummation of business performance metrics. This study can be carried out in other industry; and also, in other culture to ascertain whether the same, similar or different outcomes can be achieved.

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