

Calibrating the Influence of Digital Leadership on Corporate Market Dominance: An Emperical Study of Telecommunication Firms in Port Harcourt, Nigeria

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Abstract: This study investigated the relationship between digital leadership and organizational performance of telecommunication firms. The study adopted a cross-sectional research design. The population of the study consists of top and middle-level employees of the four major telecommunication firms in Rivers State. The Spearman's Rank Order Correlation Coefficient was adopted in testing the four proposed hypotheses. Based on these analyses, results revealed that the two dimensions of Digital Leadership (Digital Competence and Innovative Thinking) both had positive and significant relationship with the measures of Organizational Performance, which are Market Share and Increased Patronage. Based on the findings, the study concludes that there is a very high positive and significant relationship between Digital Leadership and Organizational Performance of telecommunication firms in Rivers State. Consequently, the study recommends that Management of telecommunication firms who want to improve their performance should ensure that decision-making is necessarily premised on digital competence. This means that leaders of these organisations should rely heavily on data before taking key decisions that bear on the survival of the organisation. In doing this, both market share and increased patronage would be enhanced, thereby leading to improved organisational performance. In addition, telecommunication firms are encouraged to evolve innovative thinking that fully embraces information technology in all their operations, including production and service delivery. Herein, as this research has confirmed, lies the recipe for their strategic prowess in achieving improved market share, increased patronage and consequential enhanced organisational performance.

Keywords: Digital Leadership, Innovative Thinking, Increased Patronage.

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I. INTRODUCTION

The Nigerian telecommunications industry has undergone significant transformation over the past decade, contributing substantially to the economy. By the end of 2018, the sector accounted for 77.42% of ICT's sub-sector GDP and 9.46% of national GDP, driven by deregulation and growth in subscriptions (NCC, 2019). The industry's performance is largely influenced by digital transformation, which is dependent on effective digital leadership. This leadership has become essential in driving market share, increased patronage, and profitability (Sulaimon et al., 2016).

Digital innovation in the telecom sector, such as the privatization of NITEL in 2007 and the ongoing broadband revolution, has enhanced service delivery. Digital leadership plays a vital role in facilitating this transformation by

fostering a culture of digitization and innovation (Wahid & Zulkifli, 2021). It also emphasizes the adoption of digital competence decision-making, strategic alignment, and talent acquisition to navigate technological advancements (Brunswick, Bertino & Matei, 2015).

Research in this area has shown that digital leadership positively impacts organizational performance across various industries, such as the UK and Vietnam, with improvements in innovativeness, productivity, and operational efficiency (Abdelhak et al., 2024; Le et al., 2023). However, there is limited literature examining the relationship between digital leadership and organizational performance in Nigerian telecommunications firms, specifically in Rivers State. To address this gap, the present study explores the relationship between digital leadership and organizational performance in this sector.

➤ *Statement of the Problem*

The Nigeria telecommunication sector prides itself as one of the largest and leading telecom markets in Africa. Though, the sector in the last two decades has contributed immensely to Nigerian's economy; however, there has been a decline of GSM mobile subscribers as the market grapples with digital revolution, ushering new challenges. In recent years, stakeholders in the telecom industry have been faced with challenges such as government regulatory policies that have resulted to economic downturn; network/service-related issues; undue data or airtime charges; unnecessary or incessant SMS subscription messages; series of telecom infrastructure vandalization, increased competition by internet service providers, rapid changes in active subscribers' lifestyle, cyber-security & privacy, transparency problems, etc. The aforementioned issues of course are evident in reduced market share, reduced patronage, dissatisfaction and negative word of mouth and these symptoms are seen to negatively impact organizational performance.

In view of the above challenges, this intends to empirically prove the relationship between digital leadership and organizational performance with telecommunications firms as the main focus. To this, the study adopted digital competence and innovative thinking as the solution variable to solve the problem of performance as manifested in market share and increased patronage.

➤ *Aim and Objectives*

The aim of this study is to investigate the relationship between digital leadership and organisational performance of telecommunication firms in Rivers State. However, its specific objectives are to:

- Investigate the relationship between digital competence-oriented leadership and market share of telecommunication firms in Port Harcourt.
- Evaluate the relationship digital competence-oriented leadership and increased patronage of telecommunication firms in Port Harcourt.
- Find out if there is a relationship between innovative thinking and market share of telecommunication firms in Port Harcourt.
- Evaluate the relationship between innovative thinking and increased patronage of telecommunication firms in Port Harcourt.

➤ *Research Question*

In view of these specific objectives, the following questions were fundamental in realizing the aim of the study:

- What is the nature of relationship between digital competence oriented and market share of telecommunication firms in Port Harcourt?
- What is the nature of relationship between digital competence oriented and increased patronage of telecommunication firms in Port Harcourt?
- What is the nature of relationship between innovative thinking and market share of telecommunication firms in Port Harcourt?

- What is the nature of relationship between innovative thinking and increased patronage of telecommunication firms in Port Harcourt?

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

A. *Theoretical Framework*

This study is essentially domiciled in the analytical and normative theoretical frameworks advanced by Skillern (2007), as reviewed below.

➤ *Network Leadership Theory*

The Network Leadership Theory was developed as an extension of leadership theory by Wei-Skillern (2007), a scholar and practitioner in the fields of non-profit management and social entrepreneurship. Network leadership theory is about leveraging digital networks and collaboration tools to lead virtual teams, partners, and stakeholders. Leaders must understand how to build and nurture effective digital networks to facilitate communication and collaboration across various platforms and channels (Provan & Kenis, 2008). Network Leadership Theory is a leadership approach that emphasizes collaboration, coordination, and the utilization of networks and relationships to achieve organisational goals. It involves leveraging connections with individuals, groups, and organisations both inside and outside the organisation to enhance effectiveness and adaptability. By applying Network Leadership Theory, management can improve organisational resilience in the face of challenges and uncertainties through collaborative networks. Management can foster collaboration and build networks of interconnected individuals and teams within the organisation. This enables the sharing of knowledge, resources, and best practices, enhancing the organisation's ability to adapt and respond collectively to challenges (Provan & Kenis, 2008).

By applying Network Leadership Theory, management can also improve organisational performance in the face of challenges and uncertainties through engaging external stakeholders. In addition to internal networks, management can cultivate relationships with external stakeholders such as suppliers, customers, government agencies, and community organisations. Bresciani, Cattaneo & Mirabelli (2021) noted that these relationships can provide valuable support, information, and resources during times of crisis or change. Management may guarantee that relevant information reaches decision-makers quickly by encouraging an open and transparent culture. This will help them make well-informed judgments and act quickly to seize new possibilities or threats. Facilitating Learning and Innovation: Networks offer opportunities for learning and innovation. Management can encourage experimentation and idea-sharing within the organisation, facilitating the exchange of innovative practices that can bolster the organisation's capacity to improve productivity and increased patronage (Uhl-Bien & McKelvey, 2007). Therefore, the importance of applying Network Leadership Theory in digital leadership with aim to improve organisational performance cannot be over emphasized.

➤ *Concept of Digital Leadership*

Digital leadership is the capability of a leader to employ digital technology to exert influence and direction on team members so that company's goals can be achieved (Saputra & Saputra, 2020). Digital leadership can also be defined as a fast, cooperative, and team-oriented approach with a strong focus on innovation where a digital-oriented leader can apply new methods and instruments to provide solutions to complex problems and maintain business continuity (Oberer & Erkollar, 2018). In addition, it is also a set of technology-mediated social influence processes intended to change attitudes, feelings, thinking, behaviour, and performance in organizations (Roman et al. 2018). Several studies also defined digital leadership as a vital skill that leaders must possess to carry out digital transformation. With digital leadership, company leaders can develop a clear and meaningful vision and actualize strategies related to the digitization process (Zeike, Bradbury, Lindert, & Pfaff, 2019).

According to Dimitrios et al. (2013) and Thomson et al. (2016), digital leadership is the utilization of an organization's digital assets to accomplish business objectives at both the organisational and individual levels. At the organisational level, digital leaders are responsible for setting the vision for how digital technologies will be used to improve the organisation's operations, products, and services. They also need to create a culture that encourages innovation and experimentation with new digital technologies. At the individual level, digital leaders are responsible for using digital technologies to improve their own performance and the performance of their teams. This includes things like using digital tools to communicate more effectively, collaborate more efficiently, and make better decisions.

Previous research defined "digital leadership" as a leader's ability to create a meaningful vision for the process of digitalization and execute the strategies required to turn that vision into reality (Larjovuori et al., 2016). Digital leadership, according to Oberer and Erkollar (2018), is a rapid, collaborative, team-oriented, cross-hierarchical leadership style that keeps a strong focus on an organization's innovation. The characteristics of digital leadership have lately been the subject of a large and growing corpus of research. Klein (2020) asserts that digital leaders are astute and forward-thinking businesspeople. According to Larjovuori et al. (2016), innovative thinking, in-depth knowledge, strong networks and teamwork, and committed participation via vision are characteristics that set digital leadership apart. These studies indicate that a wide range of factors are considered when studying digital leadership, including creativity, in-depth knowledge, global vision and collaboration, thinking, curiosity, continuous learning, and sensitivity to digital potential. We contend, in line with Kane et al. (2019), that four essential competencies—transformational vision, forward-looking perspective, digital literacy, and flexibility—are necessary for leaders to be successful in the digital era. First, although providing vision and guidance to organizations and individuals has always been an essential part of leadership, digital leadership's emphasis on managing changes in the future offers it additional significance.

➤ *Digital Competence*

Digital competence is an important competency in digital leadership, which comprises knowledge and competencies needed in the effective use of digital technologies by individuals in a work environment. It entails technical abilities, profound knowledge of digital systems, and the ability to manage and adapt to rapid change driven by technological developments (Ferrari, 2013). In the sphere of the telecommunications industry, digital competencies place leaders to manage complex digital structures, enhance operational efficiency, and drive innovation. According to Van Laar et al. (2017), digital competence surpasses digital literacy in the sense that it encompasses problem-solving, communicational, and collaborative skills—the ingredients necessary for dealing with the processes of digital transformation. In the setting of telecommunications where 5G, IoT, and AI are new discoveries that reshape the landscape, high levels of digital competencies become native underlying elements to competitive advantage and agility of operation.

From the global point of view, digital competencies are treated as key determinants of innovation and business sustainability across different businesses. Within the telecommunication industry, leaders who enjoy the high levels of digital competencies will adopt new technologies as levers of superior services and customer experiences. For instance, in the more developed economies, corporations like Verizon and Vodafone have leveraged positions of excellence in digital competencies to create innovative services and enhance network reliability (Eden & Gibb, 2020). It's changing how they can almost immediately react to market demands brought on by the development of digital platforms and data analytics tools within these companies. This also means that in some countries, like Nigeria, telecommunication companies like MTN and Airtel have been showing the importance of being digitally competent in overcoming such challenges as infrastructural ones and increased customer demands for better digital service delivery. These companies have adopted digital leadership as a means to advance mobile banking services, digital marketing initiatives, and e-commerce platforms, suggesting that proficiency in digital technologies is essential for maintaining growth within the industry (Adebanjo & Eluka, 2021).

Apart from telecommunication, digital literacy plays a significant role in industries like banking and retail, since it enhances operation efficiency and customer service. For instance, in the banking industry, this concept of digital literacy has enabled C-level executives to adopt blockchain and mobile banking, thus unlocking new revenue streams and increasing the quality of their customer service (Pousttchi et al., 2019). Companies dealing in retail, such as Amazon, push this mix through embracing the use of digital leadership and digital competence as drivers of innovation in supply chain management and customer engagement through personalized services provided by using AI for recommendations. Such findings across industries bring forth the broad importance of digital competence in the context of digital leadership and, more precisely, within the telecommunication industry as it

moves into a very dynamic and technology-driven environment.

➤ *Innovative Thinking*

Innovative thinking is the art and strategic approach of leaders and organizations in devising new ideas and solutions in order to add value to the business operation. Herein, considering that digital leadership highly relates to the telecommunication industry, innovative thinking is important since such a mindset propels technology advancement, shapes modes of service delivery, and adds to overall competitiveness. A digital leader, according to Wonglimpiyarat (2015), would never stop challenging conventional practices through operational methodology by employment of digital tools which would enable them to respond rapidly to market and customer needs. Innovation in this regard is not restricted to the offering of new products or services but also to the usage of high technology in rationalizing processes for cost reduction and improvement in customer experience. The fast development of technology in the field of telecommunications requests leaders who can foresee the future, implement innovative strategies, and maintain their competitive advantage in a globally dynamic market.

From a worldwide viewpoint, telecommunications corporations like AT&T and Vodafone exemplify how creative approaches in digital leadership enhance competitive advantage and market superiority. These organizations have implemented AI-driven technologies, Internet of Things (IoT) platforms, and cloud-based solutions, which play a crucial role in enhancing operational efficiency and improving customer experience (Kane et al., 2016). Locally, in Nigeria's telecommunication industry, firms like MTN Nigeria and Airtel Nigeria have embraced innovative thinking by leveraging mobile financial services and expanding internet penetration through digital solutions, fostering inclusion and enabling e-commerce growth. Their leadership's innovative focus on local challenges, such as inadequate infrastructure and digital literacy, exemplifies how regional factors shape innovative strategies (Eze et al., 2020). Where global trends meet the adaptations of their locality, it is to prove that digital leadership strategies are indeed innovative, contextual, and critical to competitiveness.

Other industries, like retail and even banking, offer considerable insights into the role of innovative thinking in the digital leadership arena. In the context of retail, companies like Amazon and Alibaba have disrupted the marketplace with e-commerce technologies and leveraged big data and artificial intelligence to offer very tailored experiences for consumers (Berman & Korsten, 2014). Similarly, in banking, leaders have implemented blockchain and mobile banking innovations to enhance financial services, much like how telecom leaders adopt new technologies to enhance service delivery. These cross-industry insights affirm that innovative thinking is not industry-specific but a vital component of modern leadership strategies aimed at digital transformation (Pisano, 2015). Change within the industry is constant, so innovative thinking is one of the most critical problem-solving methods to seize new opportunities.

➤ *Market Share*

Market share is the overall percentage of sales within a specific industry or market obtained by an individual company during any one period. It is realized as one of the major performance indicators for an organization because it reflects how well the company competes within the sector regarding gaining and maintaining consumers. In the telecommunication industry, market share is influenced by factors such as pricing strategies, service quality, network coverage, and customer satisfaction (Farris et al., 2017). Companies with higher market share often benefit from economies of scale, greater bargaining power, and increased brand recognition, which further reinforce their competitive edge. Accordingly, the market share is utilized as the dual performance measure and objective for telecommunications to ensure sustainability of profitability and also to reinforce the leading market position.

At a worldwide level, significant entities within the telecommunications sector, including Verizon and China Mobile, have persistently increased their market share by means of strategic investments in next-generation networks, specifically 5G, as well as digital competence innovations (Kim et al., 2020). These organizations leverage technological progressions and international market trends to provide improved customer experiences, which consequently enhances their market penetration and overall share. Conversely, regional viewpoints, exemplified by the Nigerian telecommunications sector, reveal that firms such as MTN Nigeria and Airtel Nigeria implement strategies specifically designed for the local context, including cost-effective data plans and broad rural network accessibility, to seize a greater share of the market (Ndukwe, 2018). Given the huge disparity in size and levels of development of the markets, multinationals and local telecommunications companies alike will accept market share as an integral indicator of company performance and relative market position.

Various views from different industries, such as retail and automotive industries, have characterized market share as crucial in the understanding of organizational performance. For instance, in the retail context, companies such as Walmart and Amazon have maintained their status as market leaders due to continuous innovation and delivery of value-added services, enabling these companies to expand their market share (Berman & Thelen, 2018). In a comparable manner, within the automotive sector, companies such as Toyota and Tesla prioritize product differentiation along with sustainable technologies as a means to broaden their global market presence (Gupta & Malhotra, 2020). These interdisciplinary illustrations reveal that irrespective of the industry, market share constitutes a critical measure that enterprises utilize to evaluate their competitive standing and inform strategic choices. In the very competitive and rapidly changing field of telecommunications, market share capture and maintenance would be equivalent to sustaining growth.

➤ *Increased Customer Patronage*

Increased customer base pertains to an increase in the numbers of users or subscribers that are acquired by an organization from one period to another. In the telecommunication industry, the customer base remains an

important indicator of organizational performance since it shows revenues accrued from the customer base, market presence, and consequently, competitiveness in the market as noted by Kotler and Keller, 2016. The telecommunication firms can strive for more and retain more customers by offering higher qualities of services, having relatively low prices for their services, and developing modern technologies to meet the demands of the customers. A large and increasing number of customers means financial success and a greater ability for the firm to expand, increase efficiency in utilizing its resources, and hold a commanding position in the sector. It is, therefore, a key indicator that influences the organizational goals and strategic plans for the future.

On a global scale, leading telecommunication companies like Vodafone, Verizon, and China Mobile have implemented customer-oriented strategies toward increasing their user groups in competitive business contexts. Companies are succinctly acquiring new customers and expanding their outreach with investments in the latest network technologies like 5G, offering bundled services, and improving customer experience through digital interfaces (Kumar & Krishnan, 2017). In the local context, such as Sub-Saharan Africa, where internet penetration and telecommunication infrastructure is still growing, companies like MTN and Airtel try to increase their subscribers by increasing data usage at low costs, expanding their networks to rural areas, and offering mobile financial services (Eze et al., 2020). These strategies below depict that while multinational companies might have the focal point of technologies to reach greater markets, their local companies would do their local companies with focusing on affordability and availability to win customers.

Other industries such as retail and banking also give meaning as to how such a growing customer may aid in enriching organizational performance. In the retail industry for instance, business entities including Amazon have increased their population through customized services, delivery options available, and even market penetration in various international boundaries (Berman & Korsten, 2014). Financial institutions such as JPMorgan Chase and Barclays have also implemented digital banking innovations and customer-centric solutions to attract new customers and improve retention rates (Deloitte, 2016). The examples from these diverse industries demonstrate that expanding a customer base is not unique to telecommunications but is a key performance indicator variable for multiple sectors. In this way, it will, over time, contribute to business growth, profitability, and long-term viability of the firm in the dynamic telecommunications industry through gaining new and retaining old consumers.

B. Empirical Review

➤ Digital Literacy and Market Share

The paper by Chikweche and Fletcher, 2015 on digital competence and emerging market growth: A case of mobile telecommunications in Zimbabwe," addresses the contribution made by digital competence in advancing the market shares for a telecommunication service in Zimbabwe. The research design adopted for the cross-sectional study had

a sample size of 150 respondents who were chosen using a purposive sampling technique. Regression analyses, in particular, showed that firms having high levels of digital competence are peculiarly well-placed in both winning and retaining market share in disrupted markets through the provision of digital services. Results also showed that digital competence remained a significant predictor of market share growth in emerging markets, where technology infrastructure is fast evolving.

Also along this line is that of Ogunleye and Adebayo, (2017), on digital capabilities and competitive market position in the Nigerian banking sector. The aim of this quantitative research was to investigate the impact of digital capability on the market share of banks in Nigeria. Data were collected using a random sample of 250 staff of five leading banks. The research, therefore, applied SEM on the data and noted that the financial institutions that had developed digital capability, particularly with regard to online banking and FinTech, had higher customer acquisition with better market share. The authors add that in an emerging economy like Nigeria, still at a reasonably nascent stage of digital disruption, it is the organizations which invest in the enhancement of digital competency that are most likely to outcompete their rivals and secure market leadership.

Ahmed et al. (2020), in their work digital skills and market share in India's E-commerce industry, researched the role that digital skills have played in determining the market share in the ever-expanding e-commerce sector in India. The authors have adopted a mixed-method approach, wherein questionnaires and interviews were used for 300 respondents comprising managers and IT professionals from leading e-commerce firms. In the selection of samples, the method used is stratified random sampling. Correlation analysis revealed that digital competence is positively and significantly related to market share, which implies that those companies that invested in digital literacy and technological innovations reaped larger market shares. The findings underlined that, in emerging economies, e-commerce firms need to focus on the development of digital skills to address the challenges posed by a fiercely competitive and dynamic market landscape.

A critical review of the above empirical studies suggests that digital competency significantly enhances the market shares of companies in different industries in various emerging economies. It is, therefore, under the above framework that the following null hypothesis can be advanced in regard to the Nigerian telecommunication industry:

- H_{01} : There is no significant relationship between digital competency and market share among the telecommunication firms in Nigeria.

C. Digital Competence and Increased Patronage

Alhassan and Abdul-Hameed (2019) examined digital competence and market performance: evidence from small and medium enterprises (SMEs) in Ghana," where the influence of digital competencies on the market share in the Ghanaian SMEs sector is established. In this regard, a

quantitative research design was adopted, where 200 SMEs from all over the country were randomly surveyed. In doing so, stratified sampling was done to capture the good representation of the SME landscape with varying sectors. Multiple regression analysis was done for data analysis. The results of the investigation indicated a notable positive correlation between digital competence and market share, suggesting that enterprises exhibiting greater digital proficiency were more successful in acquiring and sustaining a larger segment of the market. The authors assert that small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in developing economies must allocate additional resources toward the enhancement of digital skills to preserve competitiveness and augment their market share (Alhassan & Abdul-Hameed, 2019).

Ibrahim and Musa in (2020) evaluated digital transformation and market competitiveness in the telecommunication sector: Evidence from Kenya. The study examined how digital competence shapes the competitive nature of the telecommunication sector in Kenya. In this study, a mixed-method approach was adopted, wherein qualitative interviews and quantitative survey questionnaires were used to obtain data from telecommunication companies. The targeted population for the study consisted of a sample of 150 managers and ICT professionals who had been purposively sampled owing to their direct involvement in the implementation of the projects related to digital transformation. Qualitative data were analyzed thematically, while SEM was used for quantitative data. The results pointed to the fact that there is a positive and significant effect brought about in market share by digital competence, especially analytics, digital marketing, and cybersecurity. Organisations that invested in developing their workforce's digital skills saw a significant increase in customer acquisition and retention, translating to an increase in market share. The study recommended continuous training and upskilling to keep them ahead of the competition in the ever-evolving digital landscape.

A 2021 study by Adeoye and Igbinoia, on impact of digital skills on market share in the retail industry in Nigeria," researched the retail sector in Lagos, Nigeria, with the aim of establishing how digital skills would influence market outcomes. In this study, a cross-section survey method was used, and the total sample size was 300 retail firms selected through a simple random sampling technique. Descriptive statistics and logistic regression are used for data analysis. The results reveal that those enterprises with high digital literacy, especially in e-commerce, digital payment, and social media marketing, their market share increased remarkably. This study has eventually concluded that digital competency is an enriched factor in enhancing the market position of retail enterprises, especially in an emerging economy like Nigeria, where the use of digital technologies is still in its diffusion process. The authors recommended policies that promote digital training for retail entrepreneurs to boost their competitiveness and market share (Adeoye & Igbinoia, 2021).

From the reviews, it is perceptible to comprehend that the issue of digital competency features in the determination of market shares, at least in emerging economies where digital transformation started to confer a competitive advantage. Coherently, the outcomes have signaled the positive relation between digital proficiency and the possibility for firms to seize and maintain more significant shares of the market across various industries, such as telecommunications, retail, and SMEs.

Therefore, the null hypothesis, in the perspective of the telecommunication industry in Nigeria, can be restated as:

- **H₀₂:** There is no significant relationship between digital competence and market share in the Nigerian telecommunications industry.

D. Innovative Thinking and Market Share

A study by Mwangi and Kamau (2018) evaluated the role of innovative thinking in improving market share - A Case of the Kenyan Manufacturing Sector." Their target population was manufacturing companies in Kenya, especially studying the influence of their innovating ability in respect to market share. The quantitative approach was adapted using research instruments of questionnaires that were administered to a total of 250 firms in Nairobi and its environs. A stratified random sampling was also carried out to get a good representation of different subsectors within manufacturing. Data analysis used multiple regression techniques. The resultant findings therefore showed that innovative thinking at the levels of product development and process improvement were positively related to market share. Companies that allocated resources toward novel product innovations or enhanced their manufacturing methodologies observed considerable advancements in their competitive standing, in contrast to those with a lower level of innovation

The work of Zhang and Li (2020) considered innovation and market share in China's technology sector: The influence of creative strategies on firm competitiveness," these researchers have placed a greater emphasis on the technology sector in China, one of the emergent economies of the world with a booming technological market. The sequential, mixed-methods research design combining quantitative and qualitative data collection was adopted in this study. In all, 180 questionnaires will be administered to technology enterprises based in Shenzhen, supplemented by in-depth interviews with the senior management representatives of a randomly selected subsample of such organizations. The sample will be selected by using a purposive sampling approach, focusing on the firms known to be highly innovative. Quantitative data are analyzed by using SEM, whereas thematic analysis is conducted for qualitative data. The research findings indicated that firms practicing innovative thinking from organizational levels have improved their market position considerably. The capability of creative problem-solving and the creation of new technology were included as one of the integral elements of market success in the technology industry of China.

Along this line of argument, Afolabi and Adeyemi (2021) researched innovative thinking and market share in Nigeria's financial sector: An analysis of competitive dynamics that pursued how innovation affects the increase of market share in financial institutions in Lagos, Nigeria. The approach was a cross-section survey. The questionnaires were distributed to 300 bank branches across Lagos. In terms of sampling strategy, the approach was that of simple random sampling. Descriptive statistics and logistic regression methods were used in the analysis of the data. Results showed that truly innovative thinking, especially in areas of digital banking, product differentiation, and improved customer service, greatly increased market share. Financial institutions that frequently offered new financial services or had new service delivery methods received more customers and performed better compared to other institutions in terms of market share, reported by Afolabi & Adeyemi, 2021.

Analysis conducted on these reviews comes out to establish that indeed the creative and innovative thought processes are critical determinants in the market share for developing markets. That is, in Kenya, in respect to the manufacturing industry, the technology sector in China, while in Nigeria, it's on its financial services. Indeed, the establishment that adopts and innovates ways of performing its functions has a high competitive advantage and captures a large market share.

From the above analyses, the following null hypothesis is hence put forward with respect to the Nigerian telecommunications sector:

- **H₀₃:** There is no significant relationship between innovative thinking and market share in the Nigerian telecommunications industry.

E. Innovative Thinking and Increased Patronage

Njoroge and Wainaina (2017) considered the impact of innovative thinking on customer patronage in the Kenyan retail sector. This study established the innovative strategies adopted by retail firms in Nairobi, Kenya, that helped them to improve customer patronage. The researchers used a cross-sectional survey approach whereby a questionnaire was used to capture information from a sample of 300 retail outlets. A stratified random sampling method was adopted to ensure that a representation is drawn from different retail sub-sectors. The collected data is analyzed using multiple regression methods. The findings revealed that those enterprises that applied innovative customer service strategies like personalized shopping experiences and online loyalty programs had realized significant rise in customer patronage. The study found that in the highly competitive retail industry in Nairobi, innovative thought processes were important in sustaining and growing a customer base

Added to that, Agwu and Ugochukwu (2019) discussed innovative thinking and increased patronage: A case of Nigeria's banking sector" explores the impact of innovative

thinking on the development of customer loyalty in Nigerian banking. The study was a case of Lagos, Nigeria, and adopted a quantitative approach with data obtained from 250 customers and 100 employees from five leading banks. It involved a combination of purposive and random sampling in the selection of banks and customers, respectively. The analysis of data was by means of structural equation modeling. Results indicated that no innovative banking solution through a mobile banking application and automated customer service is very fundamental in enhancing the satisfaction and loyalty of customers, hence increasing patronage. The findings showed that financial institutions which embraced new technologies and focused more on customer-centered services tended to attract more customers and improved retention.

Another related study, the role of innovation in enhancing customer patronage in Pakistan's telecom industry was conducted by Javed and Ahmed (2020) in an attempt to analyze how the use of innovative thinking works in the telecom industry in Pakistan as a factor in attracting more subscribers. A mixed-method approach whereby qualitative and quantitative data from 200 subscribers and 50 representatives, respectively, was adopted. The sample targeted was purposeful in nature, focusing on participants who were regular users of telecommunication services as well as representatives from the companies involved in innovative strategies. In this respect, qualitative data collected were analyzed using thematic analysis, whereas the quantitative test using regression analyses. Innovative offerings in data plans, for example, and rewarding initiatives, as well as networking functionalities increase customer engagement. Telecommunication companies that frequently introduced innovative services and adapted to customer needs tended to have loyal customers than those companies that did not. This study identified the importance of continuous innovation in retaining and attracting customers in emerging economies.

The selected studies underline the fact that creative thinking positively influences customer loyalty in three contexts of industrial purposes in emergent markets: within a retailer, bank, and telecommunications company; with the application of innovative ways, such enterprises usually succeed in creating stronger loyalty either with more customers or strengthening the bonds with already existing ones.

Based on the above information, the null hypothesis can be made for the telecommunication sector of Nigeria as follows:

- **H₀₄:** There is no significant relationship between innovative thinking and increased patronage in the Nigerian telecommunications industry.

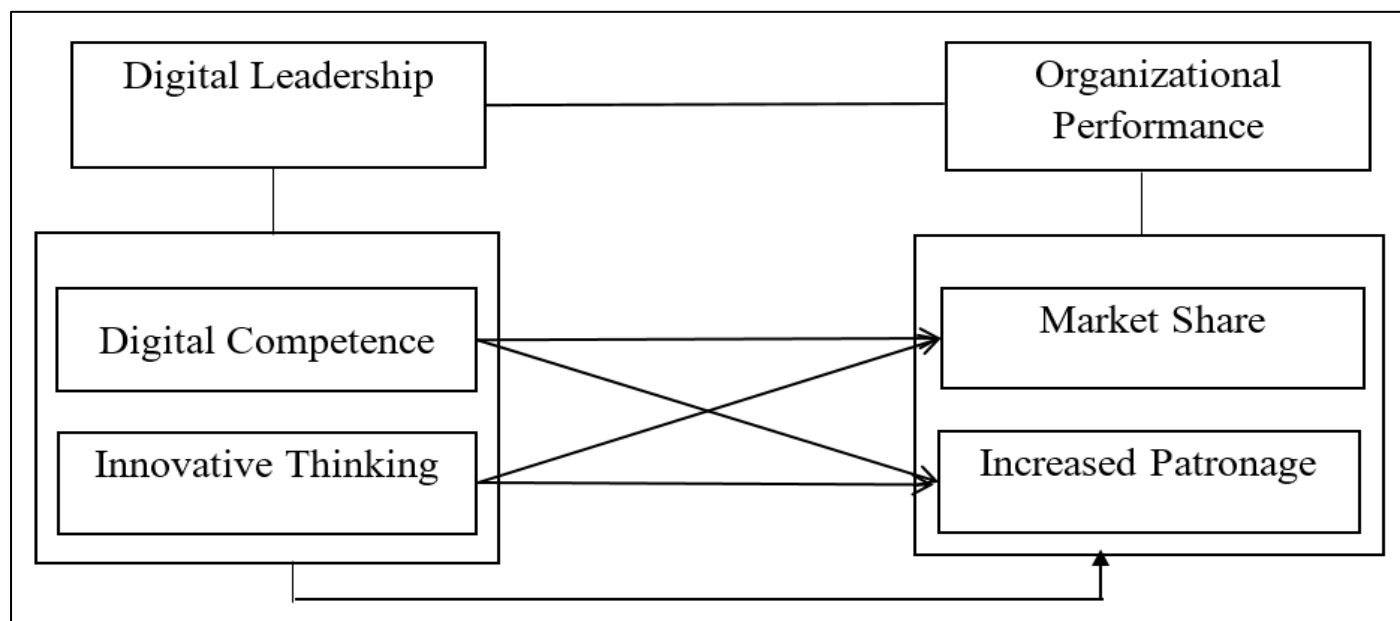


Fig 1: DLOP Model Operationalizing the Relativity of Study Variables
Source: Researchers' Conceptualization

III. METHODOLOGY

This research adopted the cross-sectional survey design. Cross-sectional survey determines the extent to which the independent variable can be used to explain or predict the variation in the dependent variable. With this type of research design, the researcher has the opportunity to access research elements at specific locations within a geographical location at a point in time. Fundamentally, the population of this study consists of employees of telecommunication firms in Rivers State. This study was limited to the four major telecommunication firms who have known and functional offices in Rivers State. They include; Aitel, Globacom, MTN, and 9mobile respectively. It is pertinent to mention that this research targeted head (or regional) and at least one accessible subsidiary (or connect) offices of these companies due to the nature of the study, as per the involvement of various leadership roles within the top and key functional areas in their organizational hierarchies. Specifically, positions that were involved across the four companies are; regional/subsidiary managers, marketing/sales heads, project managers (installation and maintenance), operations managers, and head of customer care units. These top positions fall within the top and middle (or functional) management, and was observed based on their various organograms. These four (4) top positions in both the main and subsidiary offices of these four companies constitute the research target population. Therefore, ten (10) positions (5 for regional and 5 for subsidiary offices) for each of the four (4) companies, making a total of forty (40) senior staff were involved in this research.

Based on the target population size (40), which is manageable; there was no need for drawing samples. Hence, the research approach/contact personnel occupying those positions of interest with copies of the questionnaire.

There are mainly two major sources of data (secondary and primary) used for this research. The secondary data were sourced by reviewing related and relevant literature from articles, journals, reports and other reliable sources. The primary data on the other hand, were obtained by using structured copies of questionnaire. The questionnaire method of data collection was suitable for this study because it is a consistent, stable, and first-hand data collection tool that provides the researcher with an objective perspective of the issues being investigated.

In terms of validity and reliability of the Instrument in this study, our major consideration was on face and content validity of which the instrument for data collection was reviewed by experts in the field of management and human resource. With respect to face validity, the instrument involved statement items that best explain the variables in each case, and are also easy to read and comprehend by respondents. More so, content validity explains the idea that every statement item in the instrument is obtained from scholarly works from related literature, especially those academic authorities who have used similar variables in their studies. With respect to reliability, Cronbach Alpha test was used to determine the reliability of the instruments. Extant literature suggests that an alpha of 0.7 (70%) or above is considered to be reliable (Kumar, 2005).

Lastly, this research adopted a combination of descriptive and inferential statistical tools in analyzing data. In terms of descriptive statistics, the researcher used tables and percentages. On the other hand, the research used inferential statistics such as Spearman's Rank Correlation Coefficient. It is important to note that all analyses were carried out with SPSS application (version 26).

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table 1: Questionnaire Distribution Rate

Details	Questionnaire	Percentage (%)
Distributed	40	100
Returned	36	90
Not Returned	4	10
Returned completed	34	85
Returned incomplete	2	5

Source: Survey Data, 2024

From the above table, a total of forty (40) copies of questionnaire were distributed, however, only thirty-six (36) copies representing 90% were retrieved, hence, four (4) copies representing 10% was not returned. More so, out of the

number of copies returned, only thirty-four (34) copies representing 85 %, were completely field and found useful for the study. Only two (2) copies were discarded.

Table 2: Summary of Reliability Analysis

Constructs	N	No. of items	Cronbach Alpha
Digital Competence	25	4	0.880
Innovative Thinking	25	4	0.845
Market Share	25	4	0.819
Increased Patronage	25	4	0.861

Source: Cronbach Alpha output, 2024.

Table 2 present the Cronbach's Alpha value for the instruments on digital leadership and organizational performance measures given 25 selected respondents. The following Cronbach Alpha results were produced: digital competence oriented (0.880), innovative thinking (0.845), market share (0.819), and increased patronage (0.861) with four statement items on each construct. All Cronbach's Alpha values for each dimension were greater than 0.70 (reliability threshold). Thus, it can be concluded that all items for each dimensions showed high stability, consistent results and also in the satisfactory level.

A. Testing of Hypotheses

In this study, a total of four hypotheses were proposed earlier and tested statistically with Spearman's Rank Correlation Coefficient.

➤ Hypothesis One

- **H₀₁:** Digital competence has no significant relationship with market share of telecommunication firms in Rivers State.

Table 3: Correlation Analysis Showing the Relationship Between Digital Competence and Market Share

Correlations				
			Digital Competence	Market Share
Spearman's rho	Digital Competence	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	.893
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.000
		N	332	332
	Market Share	Correlation Coefficient	.893	1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.
		N	332	332

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

Source: Field Survey Data, 2024, SPSS 22 Output.

- Decision: From Table 3, the Spearman Rank Correlation Coefficient is 0.893 while the p value is 0.000, this shows that there exists a strong and positive relationship between digital competence and market share of telecommunication firms in Rivers State. Therefore, we reject the null hypothesis and accept the alternate hypothesis, because the PV (0.000) < 0.05 level of significance.

➤ Hypothesis Two

- **H₀₂:** Digital competence does not significantly relate with increased patronage of telecommunication firms in Rivers State.

Table 4: Correlation Analysis Showing the Relationship Between Digital Competence and Employee Performance

Correlations				
Spearman's Rho	Digital Competence Oriented			Digital Competence
				Increased Patronage
		Correlation Coefficient	1.000	.856*
	Increased Patronage	Sig. (2-Tailed)	.	
		N	332	332
		Correlation Coefficient	.856*	1.000
		Sig. (2-Tailed)	.000	.
		N	332	332

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

Source: Field Survey Data, 2024, SPSS 22 Output

- **Decision:** Table 4 above reveals a Spearman Rank Correlation Coefficient of 0.856 and probability value of 0.000. This result indicates that there is a strong and positive relationship between digital competence and increased patronage of telecommunication firms in Rivers State. Therefore, we reject the null hypothesis and accept the alternate hypothesis, because the PV (0.000) < 0.05 level of significance.

➤ *Hypothesis Three*

- **H₀₃:** There is no significantly relationship between innovative thinking and market share of telecommunication firms in Rivers State.

Table 5: Correlation Analysis Showing the Relationship between Innovative Thinking And Market Share

Correlations				
Spearman's Rho	Innovative Thinking			Innovative Thinking
				Market Share
		Correlation Coefficient	1.000	.861*
	Market Share	Sig. (2-Tailed)	.	
		N	332	332
		Correlation Coefficient	.861*	1.000
		Sig. (2-Tailed)	.000	.
		N	332	332

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

Source: Field Survey Data, 2024, SPSS 22 Output.

- **Decision:** From Table 5, above reveals a Spearman Rank Correlation Coefficient of 0.861 and probability value of 0.000. This result indicates that there is a strong and positive relationship between innovative thinking and market share of telecommunication firms in Port Harcourt. Therefore, we reject the null hypothesis and accept the alternate hypothesis, because the PV (0.000) < 0.05 level of significance.

➤ *Hypothesis Four*

- **H₀₄:** innovative thinking does not significantly relate with employee performance optimization of telecommunication firms in Rivers State.

Table 6: Correlation Analysis Showing the Relationship Innovative Thinking and Increased Patronage

Correlations				
Spearman's Rho	Innovative Thinking			Innovative Thinking
				Increased Patronage
		Correlation Coefficient	1.000	.899
	Increased Patronage	Sig. (2-Tailed)	.	.000
		N	332	332
		Correlation Coefficient	.899	1.000
		Sig. (2-Tailed)	.000	.
		N	332	332

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

Source: Field Survey Data, 2024, SPSS 22 Output.

- **Decision:** From Table 6, the Spearman Rank Correlation Coefficient of 0.899 and probability value of 0.000. This result indicates that there is a strong and positive relationship between innovative thinking and increased patronage of telecommunication firms in Rivers State. Therefore, we reject the null hypothesis and accept the

alternate hypothesis, because the PV (0.000) < 0.05 level of significance.

B. Discussion of Findings

The first hypothetic statement (H_{01}) examined the significant relationship between digital competence and market share of telecommunication firms in Rivers State. The statement was tested using Spearman Rank Correlation Coefficient analysis tools, and result revealed $\rho = 0.893$. This implies that 80% of market share in the telecommunication industry in Riverststae can be determined by digital competence of the leaders of these firms. This finding is consistent with the finding of Ogunleye and Adebayo, (2017) whose study within the banking sector asserted that the financial institutions that had developed digital capability, particularly with regard to online banking and FinTech, had higher customer acquisition with better market share.

The second hypothetical statement (H_{02}) was designed to examine the relationship between digital competence oriented and increased patronage of telecommunication firms in Rivers State. In this case, result showed a $\rho=0.856$. This suggests that 73% of increased patronage of telecom products and services can be tied to leadership digital competence. The analysis revealed that digital competence has a positive and significant relationship with increased patronage. These findings corroborated with the finding of Ibrahim and Musa in (2020) which opined that there is a positive and significant effect brought about in market share by digital competence, especially analytics, digital marketing, and cybersecurity.

H_{03} investigated the relationship between innovative thinking and market share of telecommunication firms in Rivers State. The result ($\rho=0.861$) which translates to 74% implies that market share can be influenced by innovative thinking of leaders in this industry. This revealed the existence of a positive and significant relationship between innovative thinking and market share of telecommunication firms in Rivers State.

This is in liner with the findings of Zhang and Li (2020) who stated in their finding that firms practicing innovative thinking from organizational levels have improved their market position considerably Lastly, hypothesis four (H_{04}) evaluated the relationship between innovative thinking and increased patronage. The result revealed a statistical value of $\rho = 0.899$. this implies that 80% of increased patronage can be driven by innovative thinking. This showed that innovative thinking has a positive and significant relationship with increased patronage of telecommunication firms in Rivers State. This finding is in agreement with the findings of Agwu and Ugochukwu (2019) who affirmed that innovative banking solution through a mobile banking application and automated customer service is very fundamental in enhancing the satisfaction and loyalty of customers, hence increasing patronage.

V. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

A. Conclusion

Based on the fact that the study examined the relationship between digital leadership and organisational performance and the findings obtained, it becomes important

to draw valid conclusions. Based on the analyses carried out findings revealed, this study drew the following conclusions:

- There is a positive and significant relationship between digital competence and market share and increased patronage of telecommunication firms in Rivers State.
- innovative thinking has a positive and strong correlation with market share and increased patronage, which in-turn enhances organizational performance of telecommunication firms in Rivers State.

This suggests that digital leadership can improve organisational market share and increased patronage and the overall organizational performance of telecommunication firms. Therefore, the study concluded from the findings that there is a significant relationship between digital leadership and organisational performance of telecommunication firms in Rivers State.

B. Recommendations

➤ *Based on the findings, the study made the following recommendations:*

- Management of telecommunication who wants to improve the performance should ensure that decision-making should be based digital competence. This means that leaders of these organisation should rely heavily on quality data before taking key decisions that bear on the survival of the organisation. In doing this, both market share and increased patronage would be improved, thereby leading to organisational performance.
- Telecommunication firms are encouraged to build a innovative thinking culture that fully embraces information technology in all their operations; including introducing leading product, service and solutions, hence they should invest strategically in industry research; as the current study has confirmed their strategic prowess in achieving improved market share, increased patronage and organisational performance through digital leadership proxies studied therein.

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