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Strategic Focus in Driving Nigeria Towards the Commercial Capital of Africa: Lessons from Yiwu International Trade City in China

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Abstract
This study examined the strategic focus required to position Nigeria as the commercial capital of Africa by drawing lessons from Yiwu International Trade City, China. The study focused on the measures Nigeria should adopt from Yiwu for commercial development and examined the strategic success factors underpinning Yiwu's commercial development. At the same time, the study evaluated Nigeria's institutional, infrastructural, policy, and market dynamics and developed a strategic framework to improve Nigeria's commercial competitiveness. The study used a quantitative research design and gathered data through structured questionnaires administered to 372 stakeholders in both the commercial and trade sectors; 346 questionnaires were analyzed using Structural Equation Modeling. The results indicated that Yiwu's strategic success factors, institutional and infrastructural dynamics, and the adaptation of Yiwu's commercial model all have a positive and significant impact on Nigeria's commercial competitiveness and its quest to become the continent's commercial hub. The study concludes that, for sustainable commercial development, integrated strategic planning, efficient logistics, digital transformation, policy continuity, and effective public-private partnerships are critical.

Keywords: Strategic Commercial Development, Commercial Competitiveness, Yiwu International Trade City, Nigeria, Africa.

Introduction

Commercial cities have evolved into key drivers of national competitiveness, combining trade, logistics, the digital economy, industrial clusters, and effective governance into integrated economic ecosystems. Yiwu International Trade City's history of sustainable commercial development and international trade competitiveness, which has turned a relatively

small local marketplace into one of the world's largest wholesale centers, exemplifies the positive effects of deliberate strategic planning, supportive public policy, advanced logistics infrastructure, and digital innovation (Mi et al., 2026; Fransen, 2021; Li et al., 2024). Recent evidence also shows that effective logistics, trade facilitation, and transport connectivity strongly affect commercial productivity, export performance, and economic growth in both developed and developing economies (World Bank, 2023; OECD, 2023; UNCTAD, 2023; Wang & Sua, 2025). Nigeria has tremendous economic potential due to its immense domestic market size, strategic geographical position, entrepreneurial populace, and leadership position in West Africa. Furthermore, implementing the African Continental Free Trade Area offers Nigeria an unparalleled chance to emerge as Africa's economic and commercial hub, with enhanced trade connectivity, infrastructure investments, and institutional improvements (Oni et al., 2025; World Bank, 2024; OECD, 2023). However, there is evidence that the competitiveness of the ports does not rely only on the size of the market, but also on the effectiveness of the logistics system, the digital transformation of the ports, the efficiency of the port, the policy consistency, and the integration of the chain (Chakamera & Pisa, 2021; Veile et al., 2022; Canbay, 2024). Therefore, the lessons learned from the Yiwu experience are relevant to Nigeria as a strategic benchmark from which it can learn practical lessons to enhance its commercial ecosystem and translate them to its socio-economic and institutional context (Mi et al., 2026; Fransen, 2021; Li et al., 2024). Nigeria, although Africa's biggest economy and one of the continent's most important consumer markets, has not yet emerged as a commercial hub due to long-standing structural weaknesses that undermine its competitiveness and commercial efficiency (World Bank, 2024; Salawu & Ghadiri, 2022; Chakamera & Pisa, 2021). A lack of transport infrastructure, inefficient port operations, logistics bottlenecks, fragmented supply chains, policy inconsistencies, and a lack of digital integration are consistently identified as significant constraints to commercial growth and international trade efficiency (Ugboma & Oyesiku, 2021; Afolabi & Mudashiru, 2026; Gladys et al., 2026; Onah et al., 2026). While there are studies on logistics performance, maritime transport, port productivity, and trade facilitation in Nigeria, there is also a dearth of academic research on how to develop a strategic framework that will enable Nigeria's commercial aspirations to become reality (Fransen, 2021; Li et al., 2024; Mi et al., 2026). This knowledge gap limits evidence-based policymaking on the role of infrastructure development, institutional reforms, e-commerce, and logistics integration in elevating Nigeria's role as Africa's commercial hub. This study contributes to the literature on strategic management, international business, logistics, and commercial development, drawing on Yiwu's experience in Nigeria's changing commercial environment. It offers policymakers an evidence-based policy roadmap for enhancing commercial competitiveness, trade facilitation, logistics performance, and investment attractiveness, and for implementing the African Continental Free Trade Area successfully (World Bank, 2023; OECD, 2023; Oni et al., 2025). The findings will further give context and inform Nigeria's integration into global value chains through coordinated commercial development strategies for investors, logistics providers, industry, and trade institutions (UNCTAD, 2023; Veile et al., 2022; Wang & Sua, 2025). The study targets the strategic factors that can enable Nigeria to become the commercial capital of Africa, based on lessons learned from Yiwu International Trade City. In particular, it focuses on the strategic factors driving Yiwu's commercial success, Nigeria's institutional, infrastructural, policy, and market context, and a strategic framework for improving Nigeria's commercial competitiveness through context-appropriate adaptation of international best practices (Mi et al., 2026; Fransen, 2021; Li et al., 2024; World Bank, 2024).

The nexus between Nigeria's sprawling commercial hubs—such as Lagos's Alaba International and Aba's Ariaria International—and China's Yiwu International Trade City represents one of the most

dynamic corridors of the global South-South trade. While institutional literature often treats transnational policy and commercial transfers as uniform processes, practical dynamics reveal distinct operational mechanisms.

To analyze how Nigerian trade systems interface with, learn from, or mimic the Yiwu model, the researcher has attempted to differentiate four core transfer frameworks: Benchmarking, Lesson-Drawing, Adaptation, and Replication.

Conceptual Comparison Matrix

Analytical Lens	Core Theoretical Focus	Nigeria vs. Yiwu Paradigm	Operational Complexity	Epistemic Risk Profile
Benchmarking	Comparative metrics & performance indicators.	Quantifying infrastructure, clearance times, and trade volumes against Yiwu standard.	Evaluative / Diagnostic	**Low** (Diagnostic only; no structural alteration)
Lesson-Drawing	Causality extraction & conceptual modeling.	Decoupling Yiwu's state-enabled, grassroots-led evolution from its current manifestation.	Abstractive / Cognitive	**Moderate** (Risk of causal misattribution)
Adaptation	Contextual hybridization & localized tweaking.	Integrating Yiwu's sourcing networks with Nigeria's informal clearance and fintech systems.	Synthesized / Operative	**Low to Moderate** (Highly resilient; context-aware)
Replication	Structural duplication & institutional mimicry.	Erecting standardized, state-enforced "Yiwu-style" free trade enclaves within Nigeria.	Literal / Isomorphic	**High** (Susceptible to institutional rejection)

Deconstructing the Frameworks: Benchmarking: The Diagnostic Lens

Benchmarking is a purely comparative, metric-driven exercise. It establishes Yiwu as the contemporary gold standard for logistical efficiency and micro-commodity aggregation, using its performance data to measure domestic capacity. Yiwu's key performance indicators (KPIs)—such as customs processing duration, container throughput velocity, and digital inventory integration —assess infrastructural deficits within hubs in Nigeria. This framework identifies performance gaps but offers no structural blueprint. It shows where Nigeria lags, not how to implement reform. Drawing shifts the focus from statistical observation to causal abstraction. It requires studying the historical trajectory of Yiwu's transition from an agrarian marketplace to a global logistical epicenter and extracting the underlying socio-political logic. Lesson-drawing focuses on its early phases, where local governments legalized informal street commerce and provided foundational public goods. For Nigerian trade clusters to thrive, the researcher believes that state intervention should shift from predatory taxation and rigid regulatory mandates to proactive, market-enabling frameworks that legitimize and scale the informal economy. Bodomo, A., & Cissé, D. (2012).

Adaptation is the pragmatic, bottom-up synthesis of foreign commercial models with local structural realities. It rejects literal translation, instead modifying the mechanism so it can survive local systemic constraints. Yiwu's highly digitized ecosystem assumes seamless capital flows, continuous power, and pervasive institutional trust. Because the Nigerian operating environment presents distinct frictions—

foreign exchange volatility, port congestion, and infrastructural deficits—the model is adapted. Traders create highly resilient, hybrid networks. They leverage Yiwu's digital sourcing platforms but route transactions through informal logistics consolidators, parallel currency clearers, and localized fintech channels. This creates a functional synthesis optimized for the local terrain. Replication constitutes an attempt at literal, top-down structural duplication. Driven by what sociologists term institutional isomorphism, it assumes that copying the physical aesthetic and regulatory shell of a foreign asset will automatically reproduce its economic output. China-Global South Project. (2026). This is manifested when real estate consortia or state actors attempt to build literal, plug-and-play "Yiwu-style" trade plazas or enclosed Free Trade Zones within Nigerian peri-urban spaces. Pure replication carries the highest risk of institutional friction and systemic failure. If an exact structural duplicate is introduced without resolving surrounding gridlock, energy deficits, or the deeply relational, open-air bargaining culture embedded in Nigerian commerce, these capital-intensive spaces often face underutilization or economic rejection. China-Global South Project. (2026).

NIGERIA POTENTIAL TO BECOME THE COMMERCIAL CAPITAL OF AFRICA

Instead of viewing population as a simple demographic figure, this aspect of the analysis expresses market size by using aggregate purchasing power parity (PPP) and domestic consumption rates. Nigeria achieves this criterion by maintaining the continent's highest nominal GDP (about $470 billion) together with a detectable change in household demand. This is backed by a growing middle class that spends between $10 and $20 each day, leading to an increase in formal retail and in the agro-processing sector, which makes up more than 24% of the domestic product. (African Development Bank, 2025). The depth of capital and financial intermediation is achieved through the overseas presence of domestic institutions and the rate at which local stock exchanges are capitalized. It is necessary for the top-tier banking institutions in Nigeria to ensure that they have sufficient capital and asset strength among the ten largest in the continent, using their liquid balance sheets to support regional trade. At the same time, capital depth is assessed by the extent to which the Nigerian Exchange Group (NGX) can take on large-scale equity listings and attract non-oil Foreign Direct Investment (FDI), especially in the light of deepening currency liberalization and macroeconomic reforms. (African Development Bank, August 6, 2025). Logistical velocity and trade interoperability. Within the framework of the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA), the degree of commercial centrality of a state is determined by its efficiency as a maritime and transit hub. Logistical velocity is operationally defined by two indicators: maritime processing capacity, measured by container throughput (in Twenty-foot Equivalent Units or TEUs), and customs clearance times at key deep-sea facilities such as the Lekki Port complex. Transnational infrastructure connectivity is shown by the actual construction of dense economic corridors such as the $15.6 billion Lagos–Abidjan Corridor Highway, which accounts for nearly 75% of West African commercial activity (ISS, 2024). Digital density and technopreneurial ecosystems. Instead of using the traditional industrial indicators, modern commercial centres are based on digital ecosystem density. This factor reflects innovation in terms of the number of real-time electronic payment settlements and the amount of equity capital drawn in by domestic technology startups. Nigeria acts as the fintech hub of Africa, since its digital infrastructure regularly attracts the highest level of venture capital investment on the continent and the scale of local consumer usage allows products to be easily extended into neighbouring sub-regional markets. (US. ITA 2025) Institutional Clustering and Corporate Density. The last indicator is based on the agglomeration economies associated with local commercial clusters. It is defined in practice by the positive net migration of the regional headquarters of multinational corporations to commercial centers such as Lagos, together with a measurable increase in

manufacturing output from the designated Special Economic Zones (SEZs). It reflects the shift from informal commercial activities to formal institutional headquarters that can direct supply chains in sub-Saharan Africa. Oyewole (2022).

Aim and Objectives of the Study

Aim of the Study

This study aims to develop a strategic framework for positioning Nigeria as Africa's commercial capital by drawing lessons from the development and global competitiveness of Yiwu International Trade City in China.

Objectives of the Study

The specific objectives of this study are to:

1. Examine the strategic factors underpinning the development and global competitiveness of Yiwu International Trade City as a model for commercial hub development.
2. Evaluate Nigeria's current commercial ecosystem by analyzing the institutional, infrastructural, policy, and market dynamics influencing its aspiration to become the commercial capital of Africa.
3. Develop a strategic framework, informed by lessons from Yiwu International Trade City in China, for enhancing Nigeria's commercial competitiveness and positioning it as Africa's leading commercial hub.

Research Questions

The study seeks to answer the following research questions:

1. What strategic factors have contributed to the development and global competitiveness of Yiwu International Trade City as a successful commercial hub?
2. To what extent do institutional, infrastructural, policy, and market dynamics influence Nigeria's aspiration to become the commercial capital of Africa?
3. How can strategic lessons from Yiwu International Trade City be adapted to enhance Nigeria's commercial competitiveness and accelerate its emergence as Africa's leading commercial hub?

Research Hypotheses

The following null hypotheses will be tested in the study:

H_{01}: The strategic success factors of Yiwu International Trade City have no significant influence on the development of a sustainable framework for positioning Nigeria as the commercial capital of Africa.

H_{02}: Institutional, infrastructural, policy, and market dynamics have no significant effect on Nigeria's commercial competitiveness and its aspiration to become Africa's commercial capital.

H_{03}: The adaptation of strategic lessons from Yiwu International Trade City has no significant effect on Nigeria's commercial competitiveness and its potential to emerge as Africa's leading commercial hub.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Conceptual Review

Commercial Capital and Commercial Competitiveness

Commercial capital is more than just a geographical area where economic activities focus. Instead, it is a city or country that serves as a key hub for trade and logistics, finance, manufacturing, distribution,

and international business transactions, supported by efficient institutions, infrastructure, and market systems (World Bank, 2023; OECD, 2023; UNCTAD, 2023). There is a growing consensus that market size and natural resource endowment are not the only factors that drive commercial competitiveness; it is also shaped by the interplay of transport connectivity, trade facilitation, supply chain efficiency, technological innovation, and institutional quality (Chakamera & Pisa, 2021; Wang & Sua, 2025; Canbay, 2024). This is because relatively smaller domestic markets are gaining traction as a way to outperform larger economies by investing strategically in logistics and governance. However, academics disagree about which factors matter most for commercial competitiveness. In 2021, Chakamera and Pisa argue that logistics performance is the most powerful indicator of economic growth and its sustainability, as good logistics reduces transaction costs and increases market accessibility. However, Wang and Sua (2025) contend that policies and macroeconomics continue to play an important role, since services alone cannot drive commercial transformation without enabling policies. Likewise, the World Bank (2023) and OECD (2023) have pointed out that institutional reforms, customs efficiency, and digital trade facilitation altogether constitute commercial competitiveness. These views overlap in their recognition that commercial leadership does not come from infrastructure investment alone; it comes from the synergy of several strategic factors. In the Nigerian landscape, this composite knowledge means that, to be Africa's commercial hub, infrastructural developments on various fronts must happen together, not disjointedly, including governance, logistics, digital integration, and policy consistency. Strategic Commercial Development

Strategic commercial development involves the conscious, systematic development and execution of policies, investments, and institutional frameworks to boost trade competitiveness, improve market efficiency, and drive sustainable commercial growth over a set period (Fransen, 2021; World Bank, 2024; OECD, 2023). Unlike traditional approaches to economic growth, which focus primarily on the production sector, strategic commercial development encompasses a broader set of elements within a holistic development framework, including infrastructure, logistics, industrial clustering, innovation, institutional capacity, and international markets. A major scholarly controversy is whether market forces or government intervention should drive commercial transformation. As Franken (2021) shows, steady government policies shaped the development of Yiwu Commodity City by intentionally paving the way for private-sector growth and industrial agglomeration. In contrast, Veile et al. (2022) argue that digital technologies and Industry 4.0 increasingly enable private companies to innovate the supply chain without large-scale state intervention. These roles are not mutually exclusive; often, effective commercial ecosystems emerge when governments create enabling institutional conditions and market participants provide innovation and competitiveness. For Nigeria's commercial development, therefore, a balance between public institutions' infrastructure and regulation and private organizations' investment, entrepreneurship, and technological advancements is necessary.

Yiwu International Trade City as a Strategic Commercial Model

Yiwu International Trade City has been an internationally recognized example of strategic commercial transformation, due to the presence of all the elements of a commercial ecosystem: wholesale trade, logistics integration, digital commerce, export orientation, and institutional flexibility (Mi et al., 2026; Fransen, 2021; Li et al., 2024). Yiwu is no longer just a wholesale trading center. It has become a commercial platform with global connections, linking manufacturers, logistics service providers, financial institutions, digital trading systems, and international buyers, and undertaking coordinated strategic planning (Mi et al., 2026). In general, scholars argue that no single factor explains Yiwu's success. Fransen (2021) explains that it was mainly due to adaptive public policies that allowed for

continuous path development and institutional innovation. Moreover, Li et al. (2024) highlight the adaptability of Yiwu's foreign trade firms, noting that their ability to adjust to evolving global trade dynamics bolstered long-term competitiveness. Mi et al. (2026) further enrich this understanding, showing that, with digital capitalism, logistics corridors, and bottom-up urbanization, Yiwu has maintained its commercial status. While these views may differ on the main drivers of success, they agree that commercial transformation depends on coordinated interactions among policy, infrastructure, technology, entrepreneurship, and integration into the global market. This convergence offers a useful analytical base for studying the possibility of applying similar strategic principles in Nigeria, while also acknowledging Nigeria's different institutional and developmental context.

Theoretical Review

Strategic Management Theory

The most suitable theoretical lens for understanding how countries develop sustainable commercial competitiveness through deliberate long-term strategic choices is Strategic Management Theory. The theory holds that the best performance comes from aligning an organization's or country's resources, institutional capabilities, environmental opportunities, and strategic leadership with well-defined objectives, not just from having resources. Hence, competitive advantage results from deliberate strategic positioning, capability building, ongoing adaptation, and integrated implementation. In the context of this study, Strategic Management Theory shifts focus from Nigeria's tremendous economic potential to the strategic operations that will make that potential into quantifiable economic leadership. It is not just because of the highest population or having a large domestic market that the theory suggests Africa's commercial capital will be. Rather, it demands a comprehensive national commercial strategy that encompasses the intentional development of logistics infrastructure, institutional reforms, digital transformation, policy consistency, trade facilitation, and private sector participation (World Bank, 2023; OECD, 2023; Veile et al., 2022). The impressive changes in Yiwu are an example of this theoretical claim because the city's commercial success has been achieved through a series of strategic adjustments, cooperation in governance, infrastructure investments, and market innovations, and not because of free-market economic growth (Fransen, 2021; Mi et al., 2026; Li et al., 2024). Thus, Strategic Management Theory provides a practical explanation of the research problem by showing that Nigeria's aim of becoming the commercial capital of Africa largely depends on coherent strategic execution to convert existing economic opportunity into sustainable competitive advantage.

Empirical Review

Mi et al. (2026) investigated Yiwu's logistic transformation as a platform corridor city in the context of logistics, digital capitalism, and urban commercial development. The study aimed to explain Yiwu's emergence as a global commercial ecosystem shaped by coordinated logistics infrastructure, bottom-up urbanization, and digital commerce. The authors applied a qualitative approach to urban policy analysis based on documentary evidence and spatial development assessment. They identified interactions among logistics networks, digital platforms, supportive governance, and entrepreneurship participation that created a resilient commercial ecosystem capable of withstanding global competition. These findings suggest the need for integrated, rather than isolated, policy interventions for commercial transformation. The study suggested that more investments should be made in digital logistics and institutional innovation. However, the study focused on the Chinese urban space and not the applicability of the Yiwu model in developing African economies like Nigeria.

Based on the study of path development and institutional lock-in in China Commodity City, Fransen (2021) examined its development path. The study analyzed the long-term impact of government policies on commercial transformation and competitiveness. The results revealed that adaptive policy changes and strategic public intervention enabled ongoing commercial evolution amid structural constraints, as shown through historical institutional analysis. The study concluded that institutional flexibility is an important factor in commercial resilience and that ongoing policy innovation is needed to maintain competitiveness. However, the study focused mainly on institutional transformation and the challenges of logistics integration, digitalization, and policy adaptation faced by African economies. This constraint provides the opportunity to explore how lessons from the Yiwu experience can be adapted to Nigeria's commercial context.

Salawu and Ghadiri (2022) studied the role of trade logistics in Nigeria's international trade performance. The research focused on establishing the effect of logistics systems on the development of international trade in Nigeria. Using quantitative analysis based on logistics indicators and trade performance data, the study revealed that logistics efficiency can significantly improve export competitiveness, market accessibility, and transaction costs in trade performance. The study also showed that a logistics infrastructure shortage is a huge challenge to Nigeria's commercial expansion. The authors advocated continued investment in multimodal transport infrastructure, port productivity, and logistics restructuring. The study, however, did not discuss the potential contributions of an international commercial model like Yiwu to national commercial transformation in general, rather than logistics improvement.

Chakamera and Pisa (2021) explored the impact of logistics performance on economic growth in African countries. Through a panel econometric analysis, the study found that improvements in logistics performance significantly affect economic growth by making trade easier and more productive and reducing commercial inefficiencies. The authors called for holistic investments in logistics infrastructure and institutional reforms across Africa. The results offer sound evidence for logistics-led development on the continent. Still, the study did not develop a comprehensive strategic framework that integrates logistics, governance, digital transformation, commercial clustering, and international best practices. There is therefore a critical need to better understand how areas of international commercial success (such as Yiwu) can inform national commercial strategies within Africa. This study aims to fill this gap by combining the strategic lessons learned in Yiwu with Nigeria's institutional, infrastructural, policy, and market realities to develop an evidence-based framework that will position Nigeria as the commercial capital of Africa.

METHODOLOGY

This study used a quantitative research design because the research problem required objective measurement of variables and empirical testing of the relationship between strategic commercial development factors and Nigeria's rise as Africa's commercial hub. Quantitative research is especially suitable for studies that aim to find statistically significant relationships between observable and latent variables and to objectify, validate, and generalize the study's results. The quantitative approach differs from the qualitative approach, which explores meaning and experience, and allows the researcher to gather measurable data from a relatively large population, convert respondents' perceptions into numbers, and analyze them through advanced multivariate statistical methods. This study used a quantitative design to test the proposed conceptual model and produce evidence to support strategic policy decisions to improve Nigeria's commercial competitiveness, as Yiwu International Trade City seeks to investigate the influence of strategic success factors on Nigeria's commercial competitiveness.

This study was carried out in Nigeria, focusing on the country's major commercial centers: Lagos, Abuja, Port Harcourt, Kano, and Onitsha. The cities were chosen to collectively cover the key nodes of Nigeria's commercial, industrial, logistics, manufacturing, financial, and international trade. Lagos has the largest port facilities and hosts many multinational businesses, making it the country's leading maritime and financial gateway. At the same time, Abuja is the administrative hub where most trade and investment policies are drawn up. Port Harcourt and Kano are strategically important because of industrial and petroleum-related commercial activities in Port Harcourt. At the same time, Kano has historically been the major commercial and manufacturing center of Northern Nigeria, with widespread trans-Saharan and regional commercial linkages. Onitsha was also added because it is renowned as one of the Largest Commercial Market Centers in Africa, where significant domestic and international trading activities take place. Together, these commercial hubs provide a strong picture of Nigeria's evolving commercial landscape and, accordingly, a suitable setting for assessing Nigeria's readiness to become Africa's commercial hub (World Bank, 2024; UNCTAD, 2023; Salawu & Ghadiri, 2022). The target population included senior executives of Manufacturing Companies, Importers, Exporters, logistics executives, freight forwarders, Supply chain Managers, Government Agency officials involved in trade, Port officials, Chamber of Commerce registered members, and Executives of recognized business associations in the selected commercial centers. The above groups of respondents were purposively chosen because of their direct exposure to trade facilitation, logistics management, commercial policy implementation, investment promotion, and supply chain operations. The Manufacturers Association of Nigeria, recognized chambers of commerce, logistics associations, and relevant trade institutions revealed an estimated accessible population of 5,240 respondents. This population was deemed representative enough to capture the views of key stakeholders with the relevant knowledge and experience to provide valid feedback on Nigeria's commercial development and adaptations of Yiwu International Trade City. The size of the sample for the study was computed using Taro Yamane's (1967) Sample Size Determination Formula, commonly used in studies of finite populations. The formula is written:

$$n = N / [1 + N(e)^2]$$

Where:

n = the number of samples that are needed.

N = population size

e = level of precision (0.05)

Solving the equation by substituting the values:

$n = 5,240 / [1 + 5,240 (0.05)^2]$

$n = 5,240 / [1 + 13.10]$

$n = 5,240 / 14.10$

$n = 371.63 \approx 372$ respondents

As such, a Sample size of 372 respondents was considered for the study, based on a 95 percent confidence level and 5 percent sampling error. This sample size was considered large enough to perform multivariate statistical analysis and to estimate Structural Equation Models. Proportionate stratified random sampling was used to ensure all stakeholder groups were proportionately represented in the Sample. First, the target population was segmented into homogeneous strata based on respondents' professional affiliations, such as manufacturing organizations, logistics organizations, government agencies, import/export firms, the Chamber of Commerce, and other relevant trade institutions. Respondents were then chosen randomly within each stratum, proportionate to the stratum's size. Proportionate stratified random sampling minimized sampling bias, maximized representativeness, and

increased the precision of statistical estimates by eliminating over-representation or under-representation of stakeholder categories in the final Sample.

The test instrument used for collecting primary data was a structured questionnaire specially prepared for this research. It was divided into two main parts. Section A sought respondents' demographic characteristics, and Section B measured the constructs used for the three research questions and hypotheses. A five-point Likert scale was used for all items of the constructs, from Strongly Agree (5) to Disagree (1) Strongly. The Likert scale was deemed suitable because it allows respondents to indicate the extent to which they agree or disagree, and it provides ordinal data that can be analyzed using higher-level statistical methods. Additionally, the questionnaire items are directly derived from the study objectives, conceptual framework, and comprehensive literature review on Strategic commercial development, logistics efficiency, institutional quality, digital transformation, and commercial competitiveness (Mi et al., 2026; Fransen, 2021; Li et al., 2024; World Bank, 2023). Content validity of the research instrument was determined through expert validation by specialists in strategic management, logistics, international business, and research methodology to ensure instrument quality. Their views were used to clarify the questionnaire items, make them more relevant, and align them more closely with the study objectives. Cronbach's Alpha coefficient was used to evaluate the instrument's reliability, with a minimum acceptable internal consistency level of 0.70. This reliability standard suggests that the questionnaire items measure the constructs they are designed to measure and are appropriate for empirical investigation. The collected data were analyzed both descriptively and inferentially. Descriptive statistics, such as frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations, were used to describe the respondents' demographic characteristics and to summarise their responses to the questionnaire items. Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) was used to test the formulated hypotheses using the SmartPLS software environment. Because PLS-SEM allows assessment of both the measurement and structural models, it was chosen as the appropriate technique for the present study, which involved multiple latent constructs and complex predictive relationships. The measurement model was assessed for indicator reliability, internal consistency reliability, convergent validity (Average Variance Extracted), and discriminant validity (statistical criteria). Next, the structural model was analyzed to assess path coefficients (β), coefficient of determination (R^2), effect sizes (f^2), predictive relevance (Q^2), and the statistical significance of the hypothesized relationships using bootstrapping procedures (5,000 resamples). All hypotheses were assessed using t-values and probability values (p-values) at a 0.05 level of significance. Adopting Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) therefore provided a solid analytical framework for producing reliable empirical evidence to support strategic policy recommendations for Nigeria to emerge as the commercial capital of Africa (Veile et al., 2022; World Bank, 2023; OECD, 2023).

Proportionate Stratified Random Sampling

The total Population was grouped. The researcher created a master list by reviewing rosters, registries, and spreadsheets that include people in the overall population. The researcher selected a grouping trait and divided the population based on what mattered to the study (such as age brackets, job roles, or locations). This was subsequently sorted into categories. Everyone was placed into specific groups (called "strata"). The researcher makes sure each person fits into only one group so there is no overlap. The percentages were eventually calculated to determine what percentage of the total population each group makes up. Thereafter. The researcher matches the math to the sample: If Group A is 30% of our total population, then Group A must make up exactly 30% of our final survey respondents, by multiplying each group's percentage by our total desired sample size to get the exact number of

responses needed from each category. Pick names out of a "Hat" (Randomly) using the Paper Shuffle random name picker software. Treat each group separately by isolating each list and reviewing only one category at a time. When the researcher reaches out to the randomly selected people, ask a quick screening question to confirm they meet the study's guidelines. The study plan for people who say "no" is to over-sample upfront: To hit our target numbers, we randomly select a few extra people from each group at the start. If someone ignores us or is not eligible, we move to the next random name on that specific group's backup list.

RESULTS

Presentation of Results

A questionnaire was administered to the respondents who were selected for the study, with a total of 372 questionnaires. Of these, 360 questionnaires were returned, a 96.8 percent response rate. However, 14 questionnaires were not valid for analysis because they were partially completed or voluntarily withdrawn. In total, 346 questionnaires were correctly completed and suitable for statistical analysis, a response rate of 93.0 percent of those sent. The high response rate increases the reliability of the findings and provides a strong foundation for answering the research questions and testing the formulated hypotheses.

Table 1: Questionnaire Distribution

Questionnaire Status	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Questionnaires Distributed	372	100.0
Returned	360	96.8
Incomplete Responses	10	2.7
Withdrawn by Respondents	4	1.1
Valid for Analysis	346	93.0

Data Analysis

Table 2: Socio-Demographic Characteristics of Respondents (n = 346)

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	214	61.8
	Female	132	38.2
Age	20 to 29 Years	48	13.9
	30 to 39 Years	119	34.4
	40 to 49 Years	104	30.1
	50 Years and Above	75	21.7
Educational Qualification	Bachelor's Degree	104	30.1
	Master's Degree	172	49.7
	Doctorate Degree	70	20.2
Years of Experience	Less than 5 Years	42	12.1
	5 to 10 Years	109	31.5
	11 to 15 Years	116	33.5
	Above 15 Years	79	22.9
Organisation	Government Agencies	89	25.7
	Manufacturing Firms	84	24.3
	Logistics Companies	68	19.7
	Import and Export Firms	62	17.9
	Chambers of Commerce	43	12.4

Table 2 shows that male respondents constituted 61.8 percent while females accounted for 38.2 percent, indicating greater male participation in commercial and logistics-related occupations. Most respondents were between 30 and 49 years, representing 64.5 percent, suggesting that the study drew responses from economically active professionals. Nearly half of the respondents possessed Master's degrees, demonstrating a highly educated Sample capable of providing informed opinions. Furthermore, 56.4 percent had more than ten years of professional experience, indicating substantial industry exposure. Respondents were fairly distributed across government agencies, manufacturing firms, logistics companies, import and export firms, and chambers of commerce, thereby ensuring that diverse stakeholder perspectives were adequately represented in the analysis.

Answering Research Questions

Research Question One

What strategic factors have contributed to the development and global competitiveness of Yiwu International Trade City as a successful commercial hub?

Table 3: Responses to Research Question One (n = 346)

Questionnaire Items	SA	A	U	D	SD
Strong government support contributed to the success of Yiwu International Trade City.	178 (51.4%)	116 (33.5%)	24 (6.9%)	18 (5.2%)	10 (2.9%)
Efficient logistics systems have made Yiwu attractive to international traders.	186 (53.8%)	109 (31.5%)	20 (5.8%)	19 (5.5%)	12 (3.5%)
Digital trade and technology have strengthened Yiwu's commercial competitiveness.	194 (56.1%)	101 (29.2%)	19 (5.5%)	20 (5.8%)	12 (3.5%)
Business-friendly policies have encouraged investment and trade growth in Yiwu.	181 (52.3%)	110 (31.8%)	24 (6.9%)	18 (5.2%)	13 (3.8%)
Government and private sector collaboration enhanced Yiwu's success.	188 (54.3%)	108 (31.2%)	21 (6.1%)	17 (4.9%)	12 (3.5%)
Collaboration between the government and the private sector strengthened Yiwu's success.	188 (54.3%)	108 (31.2%)	21 (6.1%)	17 (4.9%)	12 (3.5%)

Results show that most of the respondents strongly agreed or agreed with all five statements (84.1 percent to 87.3 percent). Fewer than 10 percent disagreed with any item. The findings show that strategic government support, logistics efficiency, digital innovation, favorable policies, and public-private collaboration played a significant role in Yiwu International Trade City's global competitiveness.

Research Question Two

To what extent do institutional, infrastructural, policy, and market dynamics influence Nigeria's aspiration to become the commercial capital of Africa?

Table 4: Responses to Research Question Two (n = 346)

Questionnaire Items	SA	A	U	D	SD
Nigeria's transport infrastructure supports efficient commercial activities.	72 (20.8%)	84 (24.3%)	30 (8.7%)	101 (29.2%)	59 (17.1%)
Government trade policies encourage commercial growth.	78 (22.5%)	91 (26.3%)	27 (7.8%)	92 (26.6%)	58 (16.8%)
Nigerian ports and logistics services operate efficiently.	69 (19.9%)	83 (24.0%)	25 (7.2%)	107 (30.9%)	62 (17.9%)
Government institutions effectively support business competitiveness.	74 (21.4%)	89 (25.7%)	29 (8.4%)	98 (28.3%)	56 (16.2%)
Nigeria possesses sufficient market potential to become Africa's commercial capital.	126 (36.4%)	138 (39.9%)	29 (8.4%)	33 (9.5%)	20 (5.8%)

The findings reveal mixed opinions. Overall disagreement was low regarding the existing infrastructure, logistics, institutions, and government policies that support commercial competitiveness, ranging from 44.5% to 48.8%. However, 76.3 percent said there was significant market potential within Nigeria. Thus, respondents feel there is great commercial potential despite Nigeria's institutional and infrastructural gaps.

Research Question Three

How can strategic lessons from Yiwu International Trade City be adapted to enhance Nigeria's commercial competitiveness and accelerate its emergence as Africa's leading commercial hub?

Table 5: Responses to Research Question Three (n = 346)

Questionnaire Items	SA	A	U	D	SD
Nigeria should adopt an integrated commercial city strategy similar to Yiwu.	196 (56.6%)	110 (31.8%)	18 (5.2%)	14 (4.0%)	8 (2.3%)
Greater investment in logistics infrastructure would improve competitiveness.	201 (58.1%)	105 (30.3%)	17 (4.9%)	14 (4.0%)	9 (2.6%)
Expanding digital trade platforms would strengthen international trade.	198 (57.2%)	107 (30.9%)	18 (5.2%)	15 (4.3%)	8 (2.3%)
Stronger government and private sector collaboration would improve commercial performance.	190 (54.9%)	112 (32.4%)	19 (5.5%)	16 (4.6%)	9 (2.6%)
Adapting Yiwu's strategies would improve Nigeria's prospects of becoming Africa's commercial capital.	205 (59.2%)	98 (28.3%)	20 (5.8%)	14 (4.0%)	9 (2.6%)

Most respondents strongly agreed or agreed with the proposed adaptation strategies, ranging from 87.0 percent to 88.4 percent across the five items. Less than 7 percent disagreed. Hence, respondents agreed that Nigeria's commercial competitiveness would be significantly boosted and its chances of becoming the commercial capital of Africa would be significantly improved if strategic lessons were drawn from Yiwu.

Test of Research Hypotheses

Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) was used to test the three hypotheses formulated for this study using the software SmartPLS. The bootstrapping procedure was used to estimate the structural model with 5,000 resamples to assess the significance of path coefficients. The decision rule was: reject the null hypothesis if the probability value (p) is less than 0.05 and the calculated t value exceeds the t value at the 5 percent level of significance, which is 1.96.

Table 6: Structural Equation Modeling Results for the Test of Research Hypotheses

Hypothesis	Structural Path	Path Coefficient (β)	Standard Error	t Value	p Value	Decision
H_{01}	Strategic Success Factors of Yiwu → Sustainable Framework for Positioning Nigeria as Africa's Commercial Capital	0.731	0.054	13.537	0.000	Reject H_{01}
H_{02}	Institutional, Infrastructural, Policy and Market Dynamics → Nigeria's Commercial Competitiveness	0.684	0.061	11.213	0.000	Reject H_{02}
H_{03}	Adaptation of Yiwu Strategic Lessons → Nigeria's Commercial Competitiveness and Emergence as Africa's Commercial Hub	0.769	0.049	15.694	0.000	Reject H_{03}

As shown in Table 6, all three structural paths are statistically significant, as the calculated t values exceed the critical value of 1.96 and the p values are below the 0.05 level. The results show that Yiwu International Trade City's strategic success factors affect the development of a sustainable framework for Nigeria's commercial transformation. Likewise, institutional, infrastructural, policy, and market structures significantly affect Nigeria's commercial competitiveness. Moreover, learning from Yiwu's strategic lessons has the greatest positive impact on Nigeria's prospects of becoming Africa's commercial hub. So, all three null hypotheses are rejected.

Discussion of Findings

The results of this study provide an empirical justification for the strategic success of Yiwu International Trade City, which serves as a blueprint for Nigeria to build its commercial competitiveness and fulfill its dream of becoming the commercial capital of Africa. Based on the Structural Equation Modeling results, the study shows significant positive relationships between Yiwu's strategic success factors, institutional/infrastructure factors, and Nigeria's commercial competitiveness. This indicates the importance of logistics efficiency, institutional effectiveness, policy consistency, digital innovation, and strategic governance in commercial transformation, not only market size and geographical advantage. This matters because it challenges the conventional notion that Nigeria's demographic advantage alone is enough to make it a leader in commercial development. The study instead shows that competitive

commercial ecosystems develop through conscious strategic organization, investment, and ongoing institutional adjustment (Mi et al., 2026; Fransen, 2021; World Bank, 2023; and OECD, 2023). The results provide strong supporting evidence for Mi et al.'s (2026) suggestion that Yiwu's extraordinary commercial development was driven by a combination of four forces: logistics infrastructure, digital commerce, institutional flexibility, and bottom-up entrepreneurial development. Likewise, Fransen (2021) argued that Yiwu did not experience developmental stalemate and continued commercial development for decades because of adaptive government policies and ongoing institutional change. Li et al. (2024) also found that the adaptability of local foreign trade firms has played an important role in helping Yiwu effectively weather the storms of global economic fluctuations. This study concurs with these scholars by arguing that Nigeria's commercial transformation is also contingent on the coordinated implementation of policies, commercial innovation, and institutional responsiveness. However, previous studies have mainly focused on explaining Yiwu's internal development dynamics; this study expands the literature by empirically showing how the above-mentioned strategic principles can be systematically adapted to Nigeria's institutional and commercial context. The study also corroborates the findings of Chakamera and Pisa (2021), Salawu and Ghadiri (2022), Canbay (2024), and the World Bank (2023), all of whom stated that logistics efficiency, transport connectivity, and trade facilitation significantly impact commercial productivity and international competitiveness. The findings presented here further support these arguments by showing that logistics infrastructure, digital trade systems, and policy coordination were all seen as essential elements of commercial transformation in Nigeria. However, this differs from studies that mainly attribute the commercial sector's competitiveness to logistics performance. Instead, the Structural Equation Modeling analysis showed that the effects of logistics reforms are optimal only when coupled with institutional quality, strategic governance, digital transformation, and effective collaboration between public and private sector players. This holistic approach offers a wider answer to competitiveness in commerce than infrastructure-focused approaches. Second, adapting Yiwu's strategic model has the highest value and positively influences Nigeria's commercial aspirations, aligning with the current literature.

CONCLUSION

This research aimed to examine the strategic direction needed to make Nigeria a commercial hub of Africa, based on lessons learned from the development process and global competitiveness of Yiwu International Trade City. The study was necessitated by the fact that despite Nigeria's huge commercial potential, with a large population, huge natural resources, strategic geographical location, and a growing domestic market, Nigeria's performance in regional and global trade remains relatively low. The study showed, through quantitative analysis using Structural Equation Modeling, that demographic advantage and/or economic size alone are not sufficient to achieve Nigeria's commercial aspirations. Instead, sustainable commercial transformation needs to be deliberate. It requires efficient logistics systems, modern transport infrastructure, strong institutional performance, digitalization, trade facilitation, policy consistency, and effective collaboration between government institutions and private-sector stakeholders. Together, these contribute to an enabling commercial ecosystem that can attract investment, improve supply chain performance, bolster export competitiveness, and strengthen integration into regional and global value chains (World Bank, 2023; OECD, 2023; UNCTAD, 2023). The empirical results also show that the factors identified as key to Yiwu's transformation are relevant to developing an effective framework for Nigeria's commercial advancement. Similarly, institutional, infrastructural, policy, and market dynamics were shown to have a substantial positive impact on Nigeria's commercial competitiveness, and adapting Yiwu's strategic model was identified as the most

important factor in determining Nigeria's potential as Africa's commercial hub. These findings highlight the need for integrated development approaches, not fragmented ones. They also argue that without wider institutional reforms, technological innovation, logistics integration, and strategic governance, isolated measures such as investing in transport infrastructure and trade policy are unlikely to lead to sustainable commercial leadership. The study therefore concludes that long-term commercial competitiveness results from coherent strategic management, with continuous policy adaptation and institutional learning. With this knowledge, Nigeria is a candidate with commercial potential to become Africa's commercial hub if policymakers adopt a coordinated long-term strategy to turn existing structural bottlenecks into a lasting source of competitive advantage and adapt international best practices to Nigeria.

While macro-level aggregates position Nigeria as a dominant economic force in Africa, this framing oversimplifies regional commercial dynamics. A closer examination reveals structural nuances that challenge this central narrative. Informal trade networks, limited institutional data, and deep de-centering of the hegemon narrative complicate the assertion of undisputed primacy. The conventional narrative framing Nigeria as Africa's commercial hub relies heavily on raw demographic volume and nominal GDP. However, this perspective overlooks the structural composition of its economic influence. Informal Cross-Border Networks: Rather than a centralized hub of structured corporate enterprise, Nigeria's regional commercial reach operates largely through decentralized, informal networks. These porous borders and undocumented trade pathways reflect survivalist entrepreneurship rather than institutionalized regional integration. High macro-economic indicators are historically driven by resource extraction rather than value-adding manufacturing sectors. This reliance on oil rents creates a facade of commercial dominance that fails to foster deep industrial or supply-chain links across the continent. Advanced corporate reach, financial depth, and industrial capacity remain highly decentralized across Africa. Nations like South Africa and Egypt offer far more structured, technologically sophisticated financial ecosystems and regulatory frameworks, functioning as highly effective, competing centers of gravity. Epistemological blind spots persist: Quantifying African commercial centrality through traditional Western economic metrics introduces significant analytical distortions. A vast portion of Nigeria's economic activity occurs within the unrecorded informal economy. Standard GDP methodologies fail to capture these fluid dynamics accurately, yielding skewed data on actual commercial output, liquidity, and regional market penetration. Evaluating economic size via US-dollar-denominated metrics introduces artificial volatility. Frequent exchange rate adjustments and sudden devaluations obscure underlying domestic productivity and distort cross-country comparisons. Broad macro-level metrics create a distorted image of economic strength. High aggregate numbers mask depressed per-capita purchasing power, severe income inequality, and low human development indices, which collectively constrain sustainable domestic demand. Structural Obstacles to Centrality: Empirical realities on the ground frequently contradict the institutional narrative of an optimized commercial epicenter. Pervasive power grid instability and fragmented transportation logistics present severe operational bottlenecks. The high cost of self-generated electricity handicaps local manufacturing, making Nigerian goods less competitive in the regional marketplace. Frequent shifts in trade policy, sudden import prohibitions, and volatile foreign exchange restrictions create an unpredictable business climate. This policy inconsistency discourages the long-term, cross-border corporate investments typical of a true commercial anchor. High volumes of recorded commerce often reflect underground arbitrage and smuggling loops—particularly involving subsidized commodities—rather than genuine domestic value addition or intentional regional integration.

RESEARCH IMPLICATIONS

The results of this study have important theoretical, policy, managerial, and practical implications for the commercialization of Nigeria and other emerging African economies. Theoretically, the study enriches the explanatory power of Strategic Management Theory by showing that a nation's commercial competitiveness can be secured through strategic alignment of institutional capacity, logistics infrastructure, digital transformation, quality of governance, and policy consistency, not only through resource abundance and market size. Thus, strategic management is applied not only to organizational competitiveness but also to national commercial development, providing empirical evidence from an African perspective. The findings provide governments with policy recommendations to unlock opportunities through integrated investment in logistics, digital trade, transport infrastructure, institutional reforms, and trade facilitation (World Bank, 2024; OECD, 2023; Oni et al., 2025). From a practical point of view, the findings of the study can contribute to the strategic priorities of investors, logistics companies, manufacturers, financial institutions, chambers of commerce, and trade regulators to increase the efficiency of the supply chain, to attract investments, to make exports more competitive, and to strengthen regional integration of trade. In addition, the study contributes to knowledge by proposing a context-specific strategic framework that systematically modifies the proven commercial success model of Yiwu International Trade City to suit Nigeria's unique institutional, economic, and commercial context, thereby filling a gap in the existing literature.

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