Journal of Public Administration, Policy and Governance Research (JPAPGR), Vol. 3, No. 1, 2025. Available online at https://jpapgr.com/index.php/research. ISSN:2787-0464. Covered in google scholar**.**
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Blue Ocean Strategy and Competitive Advantage of Dangote Holdings in North-Central Nigeria

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Abstract

The study examines Blue Ocean Strategy and competitive advantage of Dangote Holdings in North-Central Nigeria. The objectives of the study are to among other things investigate the application of BOS strategies of product/ service differentiation and value innovation in achieving competitive strategies in Dangote Holdings. To achieve the objectives of the study, a survey research design was used and data collected from 70 management staff of the Dangote Holdings in North-Central Nigeria through a questionnaire designed in five points Likert scale. Data collected were subjected to careful and painstakingly analysis through descriptive and parametric statistical tools. Specifically, tables, mean scores and percentages were the descriptive tool used while multiple regressions were used to test the hypotheses of the study. The test indicated a positive and significant influence of the independent variable on the dependent variable. Consequently, the study recommends product differentiation and value innovation as means of setting the company apart from others so as to exit Red Ocean market before the wave of change sweeps take them by surprise.

Keywords: *Blue ocean strategy, value innovation, differentiation, competitive advantage Dangote Holdings.*

Introduction

Success of commercial organizations in the competitive market arena is leverage on the possession of competitive advantages over rival firms and organizations. Competitive advantage is achieved through creation of something new, unique value proposition that sets a company apart from its rivals. Attaining competitive advantages is premised on the possession of unique resources such as expertise talents, financial resources, state-of –the art technology, and smart strategy among others. Competitive advantages enable an organization achieve superior performance (Porter, 1985). Competitive advantage could be long term otherwise called sustained competitive advantage and it could be short term in nature in which case it is called temporary competitive advantage.

There exist various sources of competitive advantages that are available to organizations. It can be cost related competitive advantage in which case the basis for competitive advantage is cost minimization relative to competitors, it could be through product or service differentiation, focus and innovation (Porter, 1985; Thompson t.al, 2008; Sang & Kimitel, 2021). For organizations to achieve excellence with competitive advantages, such advantages must be clothed in rarity, inimitability, non-substitutable, and durable (Barney, 1991; Sang & Kimitel, 2021, Malik et al, 2023).

Global business environment driven by information communication technology (ICT) has increased product and service visibility across nations of the world. This has led to now than ever, the race for market supremacy which has intensified competition among rivals in the market place. It is now survival of the fittest in the market arena where the strong swallow the weak (Audu, 2023). The hitherto acknowledged Porter generic competitive strategy seems to gradually given way to the global best practices strategy of the Blue Ocean Strategy. Competition have depleted market shares, reduced resources which would have been used for innovative development to wagging war in the market place among and between competitors. These resources it was argued could have been use innovatively to deliver value propositions to customers.

However, since sustainable performance remains one of the cardinal goals of organizations, striving to possess competitive advantage become an overriding objectives (Sang & Kimitel, 2021). Sustainable competitive advantage is encapsulated in attaining economic and social results. To this end, Sang and Kimitel (2021), Uchenna et al (2022) submitted that sustainable competitive advantage leads to sustainable performance in the market place. When an organization reaches a sustainable performance level, it progresses to achieve the tripod goals of economic-financial, social and environmental.

History is replete with the facts that participants in the competitive market otherwise known as Red Ocean Market thrives in maneuvering rivals in the market place to excel. The success of an organization in competitive market is the ruin of another competing organization. It is a market where winners take all. Over the years, organizations have come to the market stage and gone into oblivion due to competition. The profits of organizations are shrinking by the day, market shares depleted on a daily basis across industries with monumental consequences on the investing public and the nation at large. Hence, the seemingly failure of Porter's competitive advantage to sustain businesses have led Managers to a voyage of seeking for alternative strategy of the Blue Ocean. In the Blue Ocean, market is no longer being competed for, and uncontested market spaces are created where everyone lives and let others who can lives.

Statement of Problem

Dangote Holdings is a house hold name in Nigeria and North-Central in particular. As of today, the North-Central part of Nigeria is host to Dangote Cement, Dangote Pasta Factory, Dangote Noodles Factory, Dangote Agro Sacks Limited, and Dangote Fertilizer Company. Thus, Dangote Holdings serve as the industrial nerve centre of the North-Central Nigeria. As profit making entity, possession of competitive advantages is clearly one of its goals so as to excel in the market place. However, its dominance in the Nigeria business landscape calls for its attention to the changing business environment occasioned by information and communication technology. The continual doing business in the 21st Century on the basis of Porters' competitive strategies could limit its opportunities and sudden loss of market to rival international business organizations that have imbibed the –in-vogue best practices of the Blue Ocean Strategy. Thus, the continual dwelling on competitive strategies of Porter may lead to complacency that is capable of springing undesirable surprises that might spell doom for Dangote Holdings to the emerging best practices of seeking competing advantage through the Blue Ocean Strategy as a game changer in the industrial terrain in this millennium. Hence, this study is embarked upon to examines the potentials of Dangote Holdings adopting BOS to gain sustainable competitive advantages as against the traditional competitive strategies as the race for sustainability rages in the global business environment.

Taking a cue from the statement of problem above, the study research questions, objectives, and hypotheses are put forward thus:

I. What is the nature of effect of product/ service differentiation on the competitive advantages of Dangote Holdings in North- Central Nigeria
II. How does value innovation influences competitive advantages of Dangote Holdings in North- Central Nigeria

The general objective of the study is to examine the effect of the adoption of Blue Ocean Strategies on the achievement of competitive advantages of Dangote Holdings in North- Central Nigeria. The specific objectives are:

I. Examine the effect of product/ service differentiation on competitive advantages of Dangote Holdings in North-Central Nigeria
II. Determine the influence of value innovation on the possession of competitive advantages by Dangote Holdings in North-Central Nigeria

The study verified the following hypotheses:

I. Differentiation of product or service has no competitive advantage for Dangote Holdings in North-Central Nigeria
II. Value innovation has no relationship with competitive advantages in Dangote Holdings in North-Central Nigeria.

Conceptual Clarification

Competitive Advantage

Competitive advantage measures the ability of an organization to develop a mechanism to outperform rivals and achieve sustainable share of the market, increase profitability and phenomenal growth and expansion in the market place relative to other competitors. Achieving competitive advantage is a product of the implementation of a mix of strategies, possession of capabilities, and distinct resources.

Organizations can strive to attain competitive advantages through cost, differentiation and focus (Porter, 1985; Abbah, 2015). When an organization developed the art and science of creating uniqueness into its products that differentiate the organization's product from those of others in the market place, it stands to enjoy such uniqueness through increased patronage (Al-Abadi, 2015; Al-Khammas, 2014; Hassan, Salman & Hawas, 2022). Equally, competitive advantage is what an organization gains when its operational efficiency is high such that it can achieve lower costs than its competitors. When organization has developed a competence up to the point that it can expand its scope of operations efficiently, it can begin to enjoy economies of scales thus leading to reduced cost of operation. Organizations can also gain competitive advantage through discovery of a narrowed segment of the market that other competitors have either not discovered or feel too small for them to invest.

According Porter (1985) and Abbah (2015) sources of competitive advantage for organizations are uniqueness, capabilities, strategic partnerships, innovation and brand reputation. Competitive advantages can be sustained through possession of dynamic capabilities, continuous innovation and strategic flexibility. Once an organization possesses competitive advantage, it gains from increased profitability, become market leader and enjoy growth and expansion in the market place (Al-Ayoubi, 2014).

Although competitive advantage serves as conduit pipe through which organizations pursue and achieve objectives, the competition it was argued will lead to decreasing market share, profitability and growth in the long run as more participants enter into the market. Hence, when organizations rely on competition in the long run, it will pose the danger of sustainability for organizations.

Blue Ocean Strategy (BOS)

The concept BOS emerged out of the realization that leading economic units cannot excel through conflicts with competitors, rather they can succeed by creating new blue oceans (Hassan, 2022; Audu, 2023; Audu & Nwagbala, 2024). Blue Oceans represent an untapped market space that are yet discovered by competitors and hence are beyond the reach of competitors (Kim & Mauborgne, 2005). In the Blue Ocean and organizations adopting the BOS they are characterized by creating uncontested market space, competition becomes unnecessary, they create and capture new demand, break the value-cost trade-off, and pursue differentiation and low cost simultaneously (Rebbouth, 2019). Rather than achieving goals through reaping the consumers as in the case of competitive strategy, BOS pursues and achieve goals through value innovation and quantum leap in value of delivery to consumers. The BOS seeks to achieve success in the market place through occupying distinct competitive position that is beyond the ability and capability of other economic units to compete (Nazar et.al, 2022). Remarkable in the BOS is that demand is created instead of being fought for by creating a new set of customers, new values, and new demand (Rhaman et.al, 2019; Audu, 2023). In BOS instead of competing for existing market space and share, efforts are geared toward doing something new and different with a view to pursuing new opportunities. It is indeed the art and science of delivering value to consumers at the lowest cost outlay without compromising quality. BOS can be pursued through product differentiation, value innovation, and cost focus (Poter, 1985; Thompson et.al, 2008; Sang & Kimitel, 2021). BOS represents a business strategy that seeks to stimulate the creation of new markets instead of fighting in the existing industries (Hamoudi, 2013)

Available literature such as (Hassan et.al,2022; Naeem, et.al, 2022; Sang & Kimitel, 2021; Hany-Aly, 2019; Rhaman & Choudhury, 2019) have submitted that BOS has a positive and significant relationship with competitive advantage in organizations. From the works above, this study looked at differentiation and innovation as the proxies of BOS which can be used for gaining competitive advantages in the market place.

Differentiation strategy

Differentiation for the purpose of creating new demand and open up a new market can be considered as Blue Ocean Strategy (Sentanu, 2019). Differentiation is the creation of unique value using the organization offerings in the market place to secure competitive advantages. It is encapsulated in anything that an organization does to distinguish its products or services, and even brand identities aimed at setting its offerings apart from those of competitors. Differentiation strategy it was argued is appropriate where the anticipated customer segments are not price-sensitive as well as in a competitively saturated market. It pays as a strategy where specific target audiences have specific needs which could not be met by the current market participants. For differentiation to be successful, the firm must have the capacity in terms of resources to deliver in a peculiar way that cannot be replaced by other rival firms (Njeka & Otinga, 2019). The authors further affirmed that for a firm to have such strategic competitive edge, it must have an intellectual property, rare technical expertise, and high-level innovative processes.

Successfully implemented differentiation, the company should be able to charge premium price for its offerings, increase revenue per unit, have capacity to drive loyal customers and achieve brand loyalty (Njeka & Otinga, 2019). Carpenter and Moore (2010) posit that differentiation strategies adopted by organizations to enhance the growth of their businesses are clothed in the interplay of diverse elements among which are: product quality, wide selection, assortments, strategic positioning, excellent after sales services, quality service, attractive design and layout, sales incentives, branding and value addition, one-stop-shop. These the authors argued that if economically carried out, differentiation can power an organization to boost its revenues, neutralizes threats and exploit opportunities (Njeka & Otinga, 2019).

Leaning on resource-based theory, the study explained that possession of resources that are rare, non-substitutable and unique can help an organization carry out product or service differentiation that provide such organization a competitive advantage over competitors. Past literature has showed a significant influence of product and service differentiation or organizational competitive advantage. Such studies include (Ubadudu, et.al,2022; Olatunde, 2021; Anekwe et.al, 2021; Onwuchekwa, et.al, 2020; Mba et.al, 2020).

Value Innovation

Value innovation is adjudged to be the corner stone of BOS (Sang & Kimitel, 2021; Audu & Nwagbala, 2024). It is the simultaneous pursuit of differentiation and low cost which is an anathema to the hitherto known logic of value-cost- trade-off that is to the effect that a firm can either create higher value for customers at a higher cost or create reasonable value at a low cost (Kim & Mauborgne, 2004). The goal of value innovation is not to compete but to make competition irrelevant (Kim & Mauborgne, 2005). Value innovation enables organizations navigate the metaphorical Red Ocean Market into BOS market where competition is made irrelevant. Through value innovation, firms pursue both differentiation and low cost, create and capture new demand with a view to creating uncontested market space.

Logically, value innovation is a pathway to Blue Ocean market driven by blue ocean strategy. Instead of charging consumers higher prices for higher quality, consumers enjoy higher quality at low cost. This is diametrically opposite to the competitive strategy of Porter where higher quality goes with higher cost. Values are created for customers at low cost thus enabling customers to benefit maximally from their expenditures (Audu & Nwagbala, 2024). Leaning on past studies, a significant and statistically positive relationship has been found between value innovation and organizational competitiveness (Kiptoon,2014; Dehkordi, et.al, 2012; Hajar, etal, 2022; Udodiugwu et.al, 2022; Olumide, 2021; Samuel, et.al, 2021).

Organization's ability to embark on value innovation depend on the availability of resources such as technical expertise, state of –the-art technology, process, and finance. Thus, value innovation can be aligned with resource-based theory (RBT). Hence, this study viewed value innovation as a strategic resource advantage that organizations can leverage on to achieve competitive advantage.

Methods

The study adopted a descriptive survey research design. Data was collected through structured questionnaire designed in five points Likert scale from the various strata of Management of Dangote Holdings in the North-Central Nigeria. A total of 70 samples were conveniently taken from the management of the target organization. The data collected were carefully and painstakingly analyzed with the aid of Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS). To achieve the objectives of the study, multiple regressions was carried out to test the hypotheses while descriptive statistical tools such as tables, mean scores and percentage were used for preliminary analysis of the data to enhance ease comprehension.

The validity and reliability of the research instrument was carried out by conducting factor analysis. The results were as contained in table 1 below.

Table 1: Factor analysis and reliability test results

Variables	KMO sphericity	Bartlett's test of	Eigen value	Variance explained	Cronbach's Alpha
Differentiation	.862	Significant	5.21	87%	.931
Value innovation	.607	Significant	3.12	52%	.878
Competitive advantages	.747	Significant	4.54	76%	.931

Data Analysis and Results

Table 2: Demographic statistics of respondents

S/N	Description	Frequency	Percentage
1	Gender of respondents		
	Male	42	60
	Female	28	40
	Total	**70**	**100**
2	Literacy level of respondents		
	ND/NCE	21	30
	HND/BSC, BED	10	14.2
	MSC/ MBA/ MED	30	42.9
	PhD	4	5.7
	OTHERS	5	7.1
	Total	**70**	**100**
3	Status of respondents		
	General Manager	7	10
	Assistant General Manager	7	10
	Production Manager	7	10
	Accounting Manager	7	10
	Procurement Manager	7	10
	Customer relations Manager	7	10
	Administrative supervisor	7	10
	Procurement officer	7	10
	Human Capital Manager	7	10
	Supervisors	7	10
	Total	**70**	**100**
4	Experiences of respondents		
	1-5 yrs	20	28.6
	6-10yrs	21	30
	11-20 yrs	26	37.1
	21 and above yrs	3	4.3
	Total	**70**	**100**
5	Age of respondents		
	18-30 yrs	21	30
	31-50 yrs	19	27.1

51-65 yrs	7	10
16-20 yrs	13	18.6
65 and above yrs	10	14.3
Total	**70**	**100**

Source: Field survey, 2025

Table 2 shows the demographic statistics of respondents. From the table, 42 (60%) respondents are male while 28 (40%) are female. Also, 21 respondents made up 30% hold National Diploma and National Certificate of Education while 10 (14.2%) are graduates and 30(42.9%) hold master degree. Equally 4(5.7%) and 5 (7.1%) hold PhD and others certificates respectively. Meanwhile, 7 (10%) each of the respondents hold various management positions in the organization. So also, respondents do have various levels of experiences with 20(28.6%) respondents have experiences covering from one to five years while 21(30%) of the respondents have over 6 years' experience with 26(37.1%) have experiences of over11 years and 3 (4.3%) respondents have over twenty years of work experience. On the respondents age, 21(30) respondents are within the ages of 18- 30 years while 19(27.1%) are within ages 31- 50 years. More so, 7(10%) respondents are within the ages of 51-65 years and 13 (18.6) respondents are within ages 51-65 years and 10(14.3%) respondents are within the age bracket of 65 years and above respectively.

Multiple regression analysis results

Multiple regressions were performed to ascertain the effect of BOS on the competitive advantages of Dangote Holdings in North- Central Nigeria. The outcomes of the regression conducted are as presented in tables 3 and 4 which showed that the predictor BOS as represented by differentiation and value innovation have positive and significant influence on the dependent variable- competitive advantage. The result of the regression showed that the predictor BOS as proxies by differentiation and value innovation accounted for approximately 95% of the variance in the company's competitive advantage (R^2 =.946, F (2, 67)=583.968, $P< 0.005$). Table 5 shows that the two independent variables: differentiation and value innovation contributed positively and significantly to the regression model. The result shows a positive and significant influence of differentiation on competitive advantage on one hand, β .694, $P < 0.05$ and value innovation on competitive advantage on the other hand, β=.189, $P< 0.05$

Table 3: Model Summary[b]

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Durbin-Watson
1	.972[a]	.946	.944	.070	1.570

a. Predictors: (Constant), Valueinn, Proddiff
b. Dependent Variable: comptad

Table 4: ANOVA[a]

Model		Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	5.655	2	2.828	583.968	.000[b]
	Residual	.324	67	.005		
	Total	5.980	69			

a. Dependent Variable: comptad
b. Predictors: (Constant), Valueinn, Proddiff

Table 5: Coefficients[a]

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients		
	B	Std. Error	Beta	T	Sig.

1	(Constant)	.534	.114		4.688	.000
	Proddiff	.694	.140	.767	4.943	.000
	Valueinn	.189	.141	.208	1.340	.185

a. Dependent Variable: comptad

Discussion of findings

The results of the analysis revealed a positive and significant influence of the independent variable on the dependent variable. In other words, there is significant relationship between BOS represented by differentiation on one hand and value innovation on the other hand on competitive advantage of companies. This presupposes that an increase in differentiation and value innovation would lead to a corresponding increase in companies' competitive advantages. These findings are consistent with past studies that investigate the relationship between BOS and company's competitive advantages as (Hassan et.al,2022; Naeem, et.al, 2022; Sang & Kimitel, 2021; Hany-Aly, 2019; Rhaman & Choudhury, 2019).

Conclusion

On the strength of the findings of the study it is submitted that BOS as proxies by differentiation and value innovation play a significant role in influencing companies' competitive advantages. This means that companies that seek competitive advantages through product or service differentiation have the tendency of achieving increase performance and stand the test of rivalry in the market place.

Recommendations

I. Management of Dangote Holdings should start looking at competition beyond the shore of Nigeria by taken a broader perspective of the global business dynamic environment and embrace BOS as agent of the emerging change in the business world. Specifically, they should consider product differentiation as means of setting their company apart from others so as to exit Red Ocean market before the wave of change sweeps take them by surprise.

I. Equally, management of Dangote Holdings should welcome and start activities that would encourage value innovation by implementing the four-action framework (FAF) of the BOS. This would enable them to eliminate, reduce, raise and create those features into their products that will set them apart in the market place.

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