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# Exploring Marketing Strategy as a Catalyst for Sustainable Competitive Advantage in Nigerian Manufacturing Sector: A Theoretical Review

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**Abstract:** Manufacturing firms are key initiators of innovation and economic growth but fail in attempt to gain sustainable competitive advantage. Achieving competitive advantage in any organization through various marketing strategies is pertinent to achieving organizational success. The formulation of theories that help explain how organization can achieve sustainable competitive advantage has increased in recent time. Through the lens of theoretical review, this paper aims to explore the key theories in literatures that best explain how sustainable competitive advantage is achieved through marketing strategies. The review exclusively makes use of systematic sampling in reviewing existing literatures on marketing strategies and sustainable competitive advantage from 1960s to 2019. The finding reveals four major normative theories that are distinctively competitive and marketing oriented: resource advantage theory, organizational capability theory, industrial organization theory and theory of competitiveness. Although there is no consensus that one theory is the best practice considering the future and turbulent nature of business environment, the paper further singled out resource advantage and capability theory as the best theory that can help organization achieve sustainable competitive advantage. Hence, business owners should put in place adequate resources and capabilities to help them gain sustainable competitive advantage over their competitors.

**Keywords:** Manufacturing firms; marketing strategies; resource advantage theory; sustainable competitive advantage; Nigeria.

## Introduction

In any business organization, the ultimate goal is to achieve sustainable competitive advantage and long term performance (Al-Alak & Tarabieh, 2011). Shokuhi and Nabavi (2019) elucidate competitive advantage as the edge an organization have above other organizations in the same business. It is the good stead an organization have above others, that aids the organization to preeminent competitors in the race, retain market share and attract more customers through provision of greater values to customers either by providing quality product or services that justifies higher prices or lowering prices of product to customers.

The effectiveness of marketing for sustainable competitive advantage in present contemporary environment is not to exploit customers in their current particularization (Taherdangkoo, Mona & Ghasemi, 2019). On the contrary, an organization's competitiveness future lie in developing refreshed emotions for customers in the business environment. This set the interface between competitive advantage and marketing to obtain significant thoughtfulness in recent decades (Kotler & Armstrong, 2013). Marketing strategies refers to tactical competitive plan espoused by the management of an organization for successful competition in their business industry (Wisena, Daryanto, Arifin & Oktaviani, 2014). It habitually entails the scrutiny of the market, consumers' buying behaviour, competencies of market intermediaries, consumers' needs, competitive activities, and market environment (Kim, Jeon, Jung, Lu, & Jones, 2011; Shokuhi & Nabavi, 2019).

Today, market have turn out to be extremely turbulent, changing constantly and competitive, the situation of market have transpose from being stable to dynamic, tame to hostile, and simple to complex (Gebauer, Gustafsson & Witell, 2011). In reaction to the changing market conditions, manufacturing firms have traditionally become more innovative and customer-centric such that producers gives to customers' products that best fit their needs (Gebauer *et al.*, 2011; Arseculeratne & Yazdanifard, 2014). In addition, to favourably compete in the market, manufacturing firms have inculcated provision of additional services offerings to customers as part of their marketing strategies. Firms with greater reliance on distinctive business strategies reportedly achieve superior return on sales and improved value of their product (Liu, 2013; Srivastava, Franklin, & Martinette, 2013).

Achieving competitive advantage in any organization through various marketing strategies is pertinent to achieving organizational success (Al-alak & Tarabieh, 2011; Atikiya, Mukulu, Kihoro & Waiganjo, 2015). This fact plainly stresses the statement that barely manufacturing of goods is basically not sufficient for a firm to succeed in the market if not facilitate with appropriate business and marketing strategies (Kim *et al.*, 2011). Nevertheless, as manufacturing industry continue to attract more investors, a fundamental change has occurred in the business industry, the metric of quality, lowering products price and segmentation has present a great concern and problem for all manufacturers in winning more markets and attaining long term competitiveness.

*Aliu & Oni*

Manufacturing firms in Nigeria like any other country of the globe is undergoing great difficulties in coping with stiff business competitiveness in today's dynamic business environment. Gross domestic product (GDP) contribution by the manufacturing sector in Nigeria has decrease and worsened in recent years. The manufacturing sector's contribution to real GDP in 2019 was 9.10%, which is lower than 9.29% recorded in 2018 (National Bureau of Statistics 2018-2019). This sector is however expected to propel the country's economy in shifting its attention from oil sector. In line with this, several policies have being implemented by the government to promote the development and competitiveness of manufacturing firms in Nigeria in recent years (Uchegbulam, Princess, Akinyele, Samuel, Ibidunni & Ayodotun, 2015; Oluwaseun, Opeyemi & Oluwaseun, 2016). This measure is a sign that there exist huge possibilities in improving the competitiveness of manufacturing firms in Nigeria. Indeed, a gap exists in this regard as it is difficult for an organization to maintain competitive advantage in the long-run without any marketing effort.

To build and maintain competitive advantage, it can exclusively be possibly achieved by creating a firm that is sufficiently vigorous in discovering new competitive advantage via appropriate marketing strategies when the old competitive strategies is exhausted (Herath & De Silva, 2011; Hansen, McDonald, & Mitchell, 2013). Thus, the rationale of this paper is to examine the most effective theory that manufacturing firms can adopt when exploring marketing strategies as a catalyst for

achieving sustainable competitive advantage.

## **Theoretical and conceptual framework**

### ***Marketing strategies and sustainable competitive advantage***

The vast majority of benefactions to marketing strategies and competitive advantage, especially within the resource based theory viewed the thought as a phenomenon that is conceptual rather than empirical in nature, with the result not exclusively nor commonly authenticated in the field (Musyoka, 2011). Nevertheless, it is required to be noted that not always does marketing strategies leads to an organization sustainable competitive advantage as the correlation that exist between the two variables can be positive, neutral or negative.

Moreover, there is difference of opinion and agreement by researchers on the degree of relationship between marketing strategies and competitive advantage. For example, Herath and De Silva, (2011) posited strongly that positive relationship exists between the two concepts. It was suggested that without strong marketing effort by the firm, it is difficult in present global competitive environment to build and retain competitive advantage. Dirisu, Iyiola and Ibidunni (2013) also suggested in their study that the proper use of marketing tools such as product differentiation offers a distinctive means for gaining sustainable competitive advantage. Other studies have also shown negative correlation between the two concepts. For example, Njoya and Niemeier (2011) argued that marketing strategy gives a temporary competitive advantage that is not sustainable. Henderson (2011) also suggested that marketing strategies such

*Aliu & Oni*

as cost leadership is not likely to offer sustainable competitive advantage. Thus, indicating that the production and supply of a manufactured goods will ultimately instigate the demand for the product.

Organizations pursue marketing strategies to gain business competitiveness that allows them to outsmart their rivals and achieve increased profitability (Liu, 2013). Marketing strategy as a distinctive competitive strategy, if when properly formulated and implemented, leads to sustainable competitive advantage and it is considered as the central pivot of organization success (Kumar, Rahman, Kazmi & Goyal, 2011; Bharadwaj, Fahy & Varadarajan, 2015). A firm can gain sustainable competitive when its marketing strategies are distinctive, offers long-term benefit and other competitors within the industry are unable to duplicate his strategies within a short-term and such strategies are constantly enhanced to keep the firm superior over its rivals (Kim *et al.*, 2012; Musyoka, 2011).

### **Benefit of marketing strategies and sustainable competitive advantage**

Marketing strategies possesses broad range of benefits and impacts to organizations that are proficient enough to influence its external environmental factors using appropriate marketing mix (Kinoti, 2011). Firms with good marketing orientation and tactics win, grow and retain markets by knowing the needs of customers and devising marketing strategies that are customer driven and oriented (Kotler & Armstrong, 2014). Marketing strategies are extensively practice and accustomed by

established businesses as a panacea for successful competition and long-term sustainability in a highly competitive market (Valipour, Hamid & Samira, 2012; Dirisu *et al.*, 2013)

Furthermore, according to Aremu and Lawal (2012) marketing strategies are effectual instruments used in attaining the objectives mission, and goals of an organization. It is also used in increasing the growth of an organization, and it is a credible component in resolving challenges posed by the business environs that facilitate and contribute to the business survival. Marketing strategy is a useful instrument in improving product sales. It plays a vital function in winning and sustaining customers, securing the growth of business, achieving financial performance and creating sustainable competitive growth and advantages (Shokuhi & Nabavi, 2019).

Nations that enjoy sustainable strengths of competitive advantage will gain prominence in the global marketplace leading to dramatic growth in a nations' economy (Alejandro, Javalgi, Gross, Joseph & Granot, 2011). Asian countries such as China and India, for example, has received considerable international attention because of its strengths and the competitive advantage he has sustained over the years in the information technology (IT) sector (Alejandro *et al.*, 2011).

### **Porter three generic strategies**

The three generic strategies of Porter are the fundamental basics that an organization needs in creating competitive advantage in order to achieve long term organizational success (Musyoka, 2011). These strategies have a tactical target on its vertical axis that is sub-grouped into two separate segments: Industry wide multi-segment and particular segment

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*Aliu & Oni*

(Baroto *et al.*, 2012). The strategic advantage is depicted in the horizontal axis and is sub-divided into two part; Low-Cost Position and Uniqueness perceived by Customer. The illustration of Porter's generic strategies consisting of differentiation strategy, leadership strategy and market focus strategy is depicted in Figure 1 (Baroto, Abdullah & Wan, 2012).

The perceived uniqueness by the customer within the strategic advantage and the industry wide multi-segment within the strategic target denote the differentiation strategy. Hence, differentiation strategy is used in big organizations where services and/or products are seemed to be distinctive by the customers (Tanwar, 2013). Moreover, the cost leadership strategy is situated in the Low-cost position within the strategic advantage and the industry wide multi-segment within the strategic target. Hence, big organizations where customers seemed lower-price of product by the producer use overall cost leadership strategy. In strategic target and particular segment, market focus strategy is situated in the Low-cost position and strategic advantage. Hence, focus strategy is exclusively used where customers' perception about a firm's product is distinctive and or being low cost provider (Tanwar, 2013).

### **Methodology**

The review exclusively makes use of systematic sampling in reviewing existing literatures on marketing strategies and sustainable competitive advantage from 1960s to 2019. The use of systematic samplings helps in reviewing prior studies from preferred domain with

special consideration to conference papers and journals for a particular period of time (Han, Yusof, Hai & Ismail, 2012; Biedenbach & Muller, 2010). This review is aimed at presenting a preface outcome of analysis of chosen papers in the facet of theoretical stance as it represents a partial work of on-going research. When choosing the conference paper and journals for the review, high eminent publishers such as Springer, Emerald, Elsevier, Sage, Taylor and Francis were most preferred. Journal of Managerial Studies and Research (IJMSR) and other online sources were also considered to get robust information. "Marketing strategy theory", "Marketing/strategies theory" "sustainable/competitive advantage theory" and/or "competitiveness theory" were the keyword for paper selection. The validity for selection was maintained using two selection criteria to retrieve marketing strategies and competitive advantage theory papers. First, the keywords were used to scan the papers titles. Altogether, there are forty-six (46) papers that contain the keyword in the context of papers' titled "marketing strategies' and "sustainable competitive advantage". Second, twenty-three (23) papers were further selected for theoretical stance as it contains theories that are distinctively competitive and marketing oriented for manufacturing firms. This criteria selection is vital for maintaining their reliability

### **Theoretical Review**

This section present the different theories used by earlier studies in showing the relationship between marketing strategies and business competitiveness. It further presents the key and most effective theory in literatures that best explain how sustainable competitive advantage is achieved through marketing strategies.

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*Aliu & Oni*

From the review of prior studies that examined the relationship between marketing strategies and business competitiveness, this paper discuss five important normative strategy theories that are uniquely competitive and marketing oriented. The theories are; 1) Resource advantage theory (Kim *et al.*, 2011; Hansen *et al.*, 2013), 2. Organizational capability theory (Acquaah & Agyapong, 2015) 3. Industrial organization theory (Leonidou, Leonidou, Fotiadis, & Zeriti, 2013), 4. Theory of competitiveness (Orsato, 2009; Wisena *et al.*, 2014) and 5. Market-orientation strategy theory (Wang, 2014). The review further singled out Resource Advantage and Organizational Capability Theory as the best theory that suit the content of the work.

### **Resource advantage theory**

The resource advantage theory is an evolutionary theory of competition that enunciates higher organizational performance to the possession and control of unique quantity of resources that are competitive which offers a means for gaining sustainable competitive edge (Hoopes, Madsen & Walker, 2003; Barney, 2012; Mugeru 2012; Hansen *et al.*, 2013). According to Hansen *et al.* (2013), this theory was proposed by Barney (1991) for business organizations and posited that sustainable competitiveness spring from organization focusing on its superior resources.

The theory made a proposition that business organization gain competitive advantage when it only set up an effective strategy that is built on a firms' resources that the competitors cannot imitate or when there exists a strong obstacle to

replication or when it is neither cheap nor simple to replicate by competing firms (Hansen *et al.*, 2013). In addition, for any business organization's resources to offer competitive edge, the theory opined that such resources must be unique, durable, not substitutable, value oriented and not alienable (Grant, 2010).

The resource advantage theory believes that business organization's resources are heterogeneous in nature and cannot be completely/freely movable which led to the differences among business organizations (Barney, 2012). Since the resources are not completely movable, the heterogeneity among firms in an industry is bound to exist for a long period of time. If a firm with limited resources is able to create value out of it, and its resources cannot be easily imitated nor replaced by its competitors, then such a firm has monopoly power. Thus, creating a prominent condition necessary for achieving sustainable competitive advantage and the high profitability.

In addition, Barney proposed that firms' resources comprise of all processes, capabilities, assets and strategies used by a firm to enhance its effectiveness. Generally, these resources are categorized into following:

1. Human capital resources (labour)
2. Organizational capital resources.
3. Physical capital resources (tools and equipment)

In addition, Miller and Shamsie (1996) categorized these resources into two: Knowledge based and property based. Human resource management-related resources were further added by Barney and Wright in 1998 to the list of required resources needed for sustainable competitive advantage of a firm. Such resources can either be intangible or

*Aliu & Oni*

tangible (Ray, Barney & Muhanna 2004; Wang 2014). Barney (2012) as well suggested that these resources may be semi-permanently attached to an organization. Barney further laid emphasis to all capabilities, assets, knowledge, organizational processes, information, organization characteristics, etc. owned by an organization that permit such organization to envision and employ strategies that enhance its effectiveness and efficiency. Thus, organizations that are proficient in leveraging its resources in implementing value-added strategy that are not concurrently implemented by other competitors can achieve competitive advantage (Mugera 2012).

### **Organizational capability theory**

The first work on organizational capability theory was done by Stalk, Evans, and Schulman in 1992 (Acquaah and Agyapong, 2015). This theory opined that in an organization, a core capability is a collective learning, most importantly how to manage diverse production skills. Organizations operating with resources that are similar often have differences in using such resources efficiently owing to their difference in capabilities, which constitute the rationale for inherent competitive advantage of an organization (Srivastava et al., 2013; Huang, Dyerson, Wu & Harindranath, 2015). Core capability is the combination of harmonized multiple skills and resources that distinguish an organization from others in the industry. The core of competitiveness is manifested in combining a lot of factors such as governance mechanisms, technology and collective learning (Acquaah and Agyapong, 2015).

Previous studies by researchers such as Alalakh and Tarabieh (2011), Bharadwaj *et al.* (1993), Srivastava et al. (2013), Musyoka (2011) and Acquaah and Agyapong (2015) posited that core capability's features can be majorly classified into three:

1. Core capability is unique and competitors cannot easily imitate it.
2. Core capability offers a firm a potential access to larger markets.
3. Core capability offers more value to customers with reduced costs.

Furthermore, the basic imperative of organizational capability theory is to achieve competitive advantage, thereby leading to superior organizational financial performance. Thus, in gaining superior performance and long term competitiveness, organizations should identify, pursue, develop, maintain, reinforce and leverage unique capabilities (Acquaah and Agyapong, 2015).

### **Industrial organization theory**

This theory was propounded by Bain in 1959 with the view that the performance of firms is being entirely determined by external forces (Leonidou *et al.*, 2013). Industrial organization theory "Particularly the Structure-Conduct-Performance Paradigm" can throw more insight on the moderating role of external factors such as competitors on an organization's effective marketing behavior (Leonidou *et al.*, 2013).

The basic imperative of industrial organization theory is that, in achieving sustainable competitive advantage which leads to better performance, an organization must readdress its structure to fit the external environment in his choose industry. This includes choosing

*Aliu & Oni*

any of the three generic strategies, and effective management of the activities in its value chain (Adamu, 2013). Industrial based theory therefore adds to the knowledge of expanding the firms' products to a new segment within the same industry or how industry that is newly formed will attain success.

### **Theory of competitiveness**

Wisena *et al.* (2014) in their study stated that the theory of competitiveness that is now widely known in 21st century was firstly proposed by Ansoff in 1995, in which competitiveness is defined as: "a number of characteristics from different distinctive opportunities in the areas indicated by the scope of market-product and growth factors" is "showed by a particular features of market-product that will offer a well-built competitive position for the firm". Wisena *et al.* (2014) corroborated Orsato (2009) study that suggested two factors affecting competitiveness, namely; positioning and capabilities. In this context, Wisena *et al.* 2014 suggested that an organization should possess "competitive environmental strategies" from the sustainable value innovation and current market to a developed or new market.

Moreover, the application of programs that are environmentally friendly must comply with firms' official recognition where the substitute strategy main concern is the regulations and laws aspect. Wisena *et al.* (2014) further suggested that it will enhance the productivity and quality of a firm product which is expected to increase the firm income. With the use of programs that are environmentally friendly and personified in the firm's certification, the firm is

presumed to offer training and guidance to their staffs or other retail firms.

### **Market-Orientation Strategy Theory**

This theory has been popularized by Bain (1968). The market orientation strategy often referred to as Market-Based View strategy opined that industry factors and external market orientation are the key determinant of organizations success and long term sustainability (Bain 1968; Wang, 2014). The core imperious of market orientation strategy theory is that for any business organization to achieve sustainable competitive advantage and superior performance, such organization must systematically gather data on competitors, potential and current consumers of a product and utilize such data harmoniously toward monitoring strategy identification, selection, execution, and modification (Adamu 2013). The theory also argued that the success of recourse advantage theory strategy lie on the premise that firms' data are not perfect which suggest that such data could be regard as resources.

Market-orientation strategy theory focuses on the organization's external factors and environment. Researchers suggested that the performance of an organization was significantly dependant on the market and industry environment (Bain, 1968; Wang, 2014). These researchers observed strategy with the perspective of market industry in the position of an organization relative to that of its competitors in the market.

In explaining market-orientation strategy, Bain (1960) proposed the concept of "Industrial Organization paradigm" that is referred as "Structure-Conduct-Performance (SCP)" paradigm. The

*Aliu & Oni*

structural-conduct-performance helps in explaining the relationship of how the structure of market industry affects organizations conduct and consequently organizational performance. It further described why ample resources is needed in an organization to build up strategy in response to market industry that an organization found itself in order to attain competitive advantage.

### **Theory selection process**

This section explain the procedures used in choosing a suitable theory to serve as a theoretical framework for the review. The five previously discussed theories in the preceding section serve as theoretical guide into investigating the impact of marketing strategies on sustainable business competitiveness from which most suitable theory will be chosen.

As earlier explained in this paper, marketing strategies was conceptualized based on three generic strategies of Porter that are the fundamental basics that an organization needs in creating competitive advantage; cost leadership, differentiation and market focus. Using this conceptualization as bedrock, the theory that is most suitable for the context of this study will be the one that most excellently elucidate the impact of the three marketing strategies components on business competitiveness. A detailed examination of each of the five theories showed that Resource Advantage Theory most excellently meet this requirement. Resource Advantage Theory best suit the context of this study as it specifically looks in-depth for factors responsible for an organizations' sustainable competitive edge. These factors explained how a business organization can gain

uniqueness and be the lowest cost producer via economic of scale, access to cheap labour, raw material and equipment.

### **Conclusion and Recommendation**

This review has explored the key theories in literatures that explain how sustainable competitive advantage is achieved through marketing strategies. To build and sustain competitive advantage, it can only be possibly done by creating a business organization that is vigorous as much as necessary in discovering new competitive advantage via appropriate marketing strategies by developing appropriate competitive theories. The finding reveals four major normative theories that are distinctively competitive and marketing oriented: resource advantage theory, organizational capability theory, industrial organization theory and theory of competitiveness. There is no consensus that one theory is the best practice considering the future and turbulent nature of business environment. To understand the impact of marketing strategies on sustainable competitive advantage, this study adopts Resource Advantage and Organizational Capability Theory as its theoretical background.

Resource advantage and organizational capability theory has been identified as the best theory that can help organization achieve sustainable competitive advantage. Hence, it is recommended that manufacturing firms should put in place adequate resources and capabilities to help them gain sustainable competitive advantage over their competitors. In addition, manufacturing firms should employ resource advantage theory as their core theoretical model when seeking for sustainable competitive advantage in their industry.

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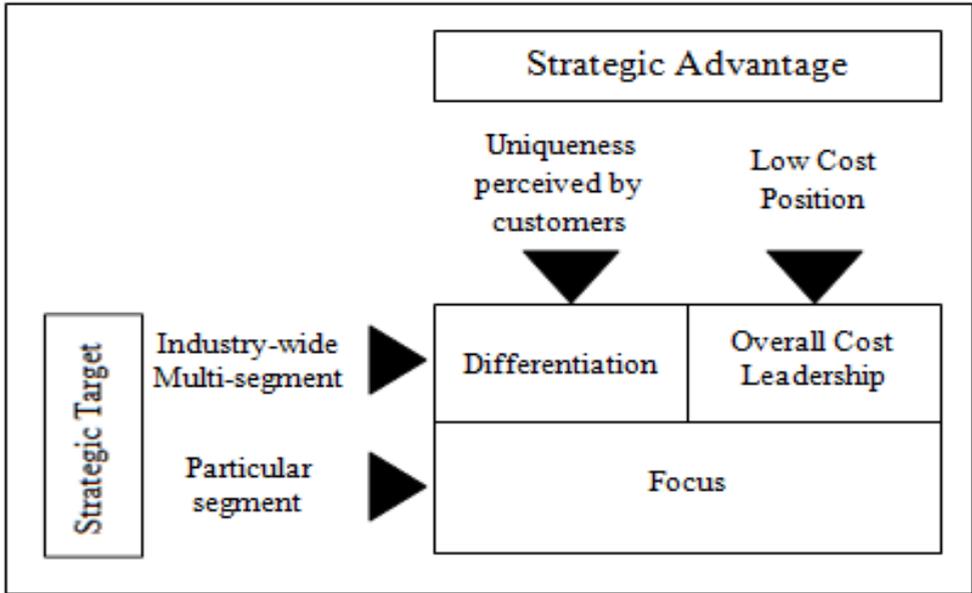


Figure 1: Three generic strategies of Porter  
 Source: Baroto *et al.*, 2012

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Aliu & Oni

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Aliu & Oni

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