

Supply Chain Agility And Marketing Performance Of Telecommunication Firms In Port Harcourt.

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ABSTRACT: *The study examined “supply chain agility and marketing performance of telecommunication firms in Port Harcourt”. Literature was reviewed using conceptual framework, theoretical framework and empirical studies. A judgmental sampling technique was used in the choice of sample size of 40 managers from the selected firms. The finding revealed that there was a significant positive relationship between flexibility, swiftness, alertness, accessibility and marketing performances of telecommunication firms in Port Harcourt.*

The study concluded that supply chain agility has significant relationship with marketing performances of telecommunication firms in Port Harcourt. Hence, the study recommended that the management of telecommunication firms should adopt flexibility as core value to respond quickly to changing conditions as to gain competitive advantages and better performance. The management of telecommunication firms should encourage/ motivate staff to be swift in implementing critical decisions.

Key words: *Supply chain agility, Performance and Telecommunication firms.*

I. INTRODUCTION

The impact of COVID-19 global pandemic evolved in different sectors of the Nigeria economy with pervasive consequences. Global trends have become unpredictable hence, companies have adapted and coordinate the agility of businesses technologies, people and processes within and outside the organizations to achieve their goals and objectives. (Ozili, 2020)

Raut, Narhede and Gardas (2017) affirmed that companies attach importance to technology and agility, which play an important role in the Supply Chain Management in order to create the most accurate solutions to the market and customer needs and also to keep their costs in balance. Swafford, Ghosh and Murthy (2018), argued that technological uncertainty leads firms to take faster and more stable action in the market consider. Therefore, it has been observed that the companies have flexed their qualifications against these negative changes and have turned to agile behavior in the supply chain. Cemberci (2015) asserted that agility in the supply chain is perceived as a form of performance providing mobility to companies. Companies have created new pattern of behavior against the constantly changing developments in the current market conditions. Agility is the strategy of recognizing the market and creating a pattern of behavior accordingly. Supply Chain Agility provides companies with freedom of movement in order to maintain their activities.

However, marketing performance of any firm not only plays the role to increase the market value of that specific company but also lead towards the growth of the whole industry which in turn leads towards the overall prosperity of the economy. As importance as this, some telecommunication firms fail to access relevant data

required to boost their marketing performance. While some are unable to implement decision quickly, strategies which has significantly hampered their marketing performance over their rivals.

Also, the problems of delivery periods, sudden changes in the supply and demand, variations in the product life cycles have led companies to adapt and keep up with flexibility, swiftness, alertness and accessibility in order to meet the developing changes and increasing customer demands. It is against this backdrop, the study examined supply chain agility and marketing performance of telecommunication firms in Port Harcourt as the major objective of this study. While the specific objectives considered as thus:

- i. To examine the relationship between flexibility and marketing performance of telecommunication firms in Port Harcourt.
- ii. To examine the relationship between swiftness and marketing performance of telecommunication firms in Port Harcourt.
- iii. To examine the relationship between alertness and marketing performance of telecommunication firms in Port Harcourt.
- iv. To examine the relationship between accessibility and marketing performance of telecommunication firms in Port Harcourt.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

This study was anchored on two theories; namely Dynamic Capacity Theory (DCT) and Entrepreneurship Innovation Theory. Dynamic Capacity Theory (DCT) was propounded by Teece, Pisano and Shuen (1997). They stated that Dynamic Capacity is the ability of an organization to adapt rapidly to changing situations in a business environment. In other word, the firm's ability to integrate, build and reconfigure internal and external competences to address rapidly changing environments. The DCT explains the interplay that connect a firm's resources and product markets to competitive advantage and organizational survival.

Dynamic Capacity Theory helps to show how firms achieve sustainable competitive advantage and survive for many years in a business environment that is dynamic and turbulent.

The theory is premised on three fundamental presumptions. The first is the capacity to sense and shape opportunities. Second, is to seize opportunities while the third is to maintain competitiveness through reconfiguring the enterprise's assets.

With these presumptions, the nexus between DCT and this study can observe an organization that sense changes and opportunities as fast as possible and seizes such opportunities strategically agile organizations. Being strategically agile makes firms perform well and makes the survival doubted.

The Entrepreneurship Innovation Theory (EIT) was first propounded by Schumpeter (1912). The theory ascribed that entrepreneurship is about combining resources in a new way by introducing new products with better attractions, new methods of production, discovery of new market(s), etc.

The EIT regards innovation as a tool of entrepreneur. The main premise of Entrepreneurship Innovation Theory is the discovery of a new product, opening of a new market, organization of an industry and development of a new method of production to suit constantly changing business environment demands.

Concept of Supply Chain Agility

Supply chain agility refers to a company's ability to quickly adjust its strategy, particularly in procurement, inventory management and delivery to meet rapidly changing supply chain requirements. The supply chain agility arises from the ability of a company to quickly identify changes, opportunities, threats (vigilance). To quickly access relevant data (accessibility); to decisively decide how to act (alertness); to quickly implement those decisions (swiftness); and to modify the range of tactics and operations to the extent needed (flexibility) (Gligor, 2015).

The characteristic, which an agile supply chain should possess first, was indicated as the market sensitivity. Observing the demands in the market environment and perceiving priorities and finding solutions for them are expressed as the market sensitivity. The second feature, at the forefront, was virtual networks. The virtual network was defined as the fact that the chain elements within the supply chain processes share accurate and full-time information with each other through information, technologies.

Nejatian (2018), postulated that one of the biggest benefits of having an agile supply chain was that it enables a firm to consistently meet customer demand around fast, affordable shipping, despite fluctuations in order volume.

However, to meet ever-changing market demands takes deliberate supply chain planning and execution.

Concept of Flexibility

Shalender (2014), described flexibility as a company's ability to modify its range of tactics and operations to the extent needed to implement its strategy. Flexibility is the capability of the company to respond quickly to changing competitive conditions and thereby developing and/ or maintaining competitive advantage. Shalender (2014), further viewed flexibility as the ability of the organization to adapt to substantial, uncertain, and fast occurring environmental changes that have a meaningful impact on the organization's performance. Singh (2014), argued all the uncertainties present in the environment pose tremendous challenge for the marketers. Traditional business approaches, with very basic underpinnings of somewhat stable environment, are no longer valid in today's turbulent and ever-changing business scenario. In the backdrop of all this uncertainty and turbulence, flexibility had taken a center stage and its ability to provide the competitive edge to the organizations had been widely recognized both by academicians and business practitioners.

Concept of Swiftness

Supply chain agility is dependent on a company's swiftness, or the ability to implement decision quickly (Singh 2014). Sosiawani et al. (2015), argued that swiftness in organizations is pervasive today, as organizations struggle to adapt or face decline in the volatile environments of a global economic and political world. Many potent forces in these environments include competition, technological innovation, professionalism and demographics each shape the process of organizational adaptation. As a result, organizations may shift focus, modify goals, restructure roles and responsibilities, and develop new forms (Sosiawani et al. 2015). Tabe-Khoshnood and Nematizadeh (2017), argued that when the environments change, the organization must eventually respond and today this must occur at a rate in ways never before seen or imagined.

Concept of Alertness

The first dimension of sales agility is alertness, defined as the ability to quickly detect changes, opportunities and threats. The same principle applies to a business setting. Before a business can respond to changes in its environment, it must first identify those changes. Truly agile companies have developed a high level of alertness (Lee et al., 2016). The alertness dimension requires sensing emerging market trends, listening to customers, interchanging information with suppliers, monitoring demand, and sensing impending disruptions, be they natural or man-made disasters (Lee et al., 2016). Toli and Tengeh (2017), opined that alertness referred to the process of paying attention to and being sensitive to the information about the objectives, events and behavioral patterns in environment and paying special attention to the problems of producers and consumers, unsatisfied needs and new combinations of available resources. They further stressed that the ability to identify entrepreneurial opportunities is generally considered to be a core attribute of entrepreneurship.

Concept of Accessibility

Working closely with alertness, accessibility is one of the dimensions of sales agility. Accessibility is the ability to quickly access relevant data. Once a company has used its alertness capability to detect change, it must be able to speedily access relevant data in order to quickly decide how to act. Information access across the supply chain is a key requirement for supply chain agility. At minimum, supply chain members need to share real-time demand, inventory, and production information. This is a challenge to achieve, since it encompasses data from dozens of sources, companies, regions and time frame (Akhigbe and Onuoha, 2019). Raut et. al. (2017), opined that once a company has used its alertness capability to detect change, it must be able to speedily access relevant data in order to quickly decide how to act. Information access across the supply chain is a key requirement for supply chain agility. At a minimum, supply chain members need to share real-time demand, inventory and production information. This is a challenge to achieve, since it encompasses data from dozens of sources, companies, regions and time frames.

Concept of Marketing Performance

Marketing performance is the assessment of the relationship between marketing activities and business performance (Clark 2011). Herein, marketing relates to all activities conducted to stimulate, facilitate and accelerate sales (Clark 2011). Effective marketing practices result in success with winning and retaining customer preferences, which supports the achievement of long term goals (Amber and Kokkinaki, 2012). In this

process, marketing should not be conceived as a separate function within firms, but as shared responsibility of the business as a whole (Drucker, 2014).

Marketing performance focuses on assessing, how well customer preference are won and retained, factors that contribute to the stimulation, facilitation, acceleration of sales, and how that impacted overall firm performance. Marketing performance evaluations can in these processes contribute to the following four functions; annual-plan control, profitability control, efficiency control and strategic control. The first and last function differ from each other in the sense that annual-plan control attempts to evaluate if planned results are realized, while strategic control strives to assess if the best market, product and channel opportunities are pursued (Kotler and Keller, 2016, Podlaseck, Schonberg, Hoch and Gomory, 2010; Alsem, 2017).

Concept of Customer Retention

Hoffman et. al. (2013), defined customer retention as the way a service provider focuses its exertion of service delivery on current customers.

Murphy et al. (2016), viewed customer retention as organizations' efforts to continue to services to a specific segment of customers in future.

Kim and Cha (2012), Magnini and Ford (2014), and Murphy (2001) in their studies, explain that the essence of customer retention is centered on the value that it is stress-free and it is not as cumbersome as maintaining existing customers as it is constantly to engage new customers.

Concept of Customer Acquisition

Kotler and Armstrong (2013) posited that finding the right customers provides a profitable return which results to customer acquisition. Jobber (2020) argued that customer acquisition refers to gaining new consumers by an organization or firm. Kotler and Armstrong (2013), assert that customer acquisition is a pre-requisite for expanding of business, products and services, and it is effective in situation where the switching cost is relatively low and repeat purchases are rare. Cheng (2020) argued that acquiring new customers involves persuading consumers to purchase a company's products and/or services. Companies and organizations consider the cost of customer acquisition as an important measure in evaluating how much value customers bring to their businesses.

Hoffman and Novak (2020) asserted that for organizations to embark on effective customer acquisition, there is need for customer acquisition management. Customer acquisition management refers to the set of methodologies and systems for managing customer prospects and inquiries that are generated by a variety of marketing techniques. Some successful customer acquisition strategies include customer referrals, customer loyalty programs, and the like (Hoffman and Novak 2020).

Concept of Customer Loyalty

Oliver (2013) defines customer loyalty deeply held commitment to rebuild and re-patronize a preferred product or service in the future despite situational influences and marketing efforts having the potential to cause switching behaviours. Griffin (2012) viewed customer loyalty as the strength of the relationship between an individual's relative attitude and re-patronage. Although customer satisfaction is crucial part of a business, satisfaction alone cannot take a business to a top level.

Customer satisfaction produces a positive financial result, especially in regular purchases. Jiang and Zhang (2016), assert that in today's unforgiving market where creating and maintaining customer loyalty is more complex than it used to be in the past years due to technological breakthrough and widespread of the internet uses. Loyalty building in a company requires the company to focus on the value of its product and services and to show interest of fulfilling the desire or building relationship with customers (Griffin, 2012).

Customer loyalty is an ongoing positive relationship between a consumer and a business. It is what drives repeat purchases and prompts existing customers to choose a company over a competitor offering similar benefits (Dick and Basu, 2014). According to Jiang and Zhang (2016), customer's loyalty is a vital source of competitive advantage for different companies. However, customer's loyalty is regarded as a challenging issue for existing corporations, especially in competitive markets (Nyadzayo & Khajehzadeh, 2016).

III. EMPIRICAL REVIEW

Hasan et al. (2018), surveyed the effect of supply chain agility on firm performance in Turkey. The findings of the study revealed that supply chain agility affects the performance companies in Turkey positively. Emejulu et al. (2020), examined strategic agility and performance of small and medium enterprises in the phase of Covid-19 pandemic in Owerri, Imo State. The finding from the study showed that the strategic agility of SMEs had impact on their performance as captured by competitive advantage. Govuzela and Mafini (2019) investigated the connection between organizational agility, business best practices and performance of SMEs in South Africa. The study concluded that the performance of SMEs can be improved tremendously through a proper alignment between the four business best practices considered in the study. Ekweli and Hamilton (2020) examined the relationship between product innovation and organizational agility in the banking sector in Nigeria economy. It was revealed that there is a significant relationship between product innovation and organizational agility in the banking sector in Nigeria economy. Therefore, product innovation in the banking sector in Nigeria led to high sensing agility, decision agility and acting agility. Bassam (2019) showed the importance of strategic agility in achieving competitive advantage through studying its impact on innovation, service quality, delivery reliability, process flexibility, and cost leadership. The study concluded that the application of strategic agility is one of the significant tools to achieve competitive advantage within a volatile and rapid changing business environment. Akhigbe and Onuoha (2019), investigate the nexus between strategic agility and organizational resilience of food and beverages firms in Rivers State, Nigeria. The study, therefore, concluded that when an organization's strategic agility increases, the firm's resilience also increase as a result of their linear relationship.

IV. METHODOLOGY

The study adopted Descriptive Survey Research Design and data collection was done with Structured Questionnaire. The sample size was 40 respondents (10 respondents selected from the four mobile companies – MTN, Airtel, Glo and 9mobile in Port Harcourt). The unit of analysis are human resource managers, customer and contract staff of MTN, Airtel, Glo and 9mobile in Port Harcourt. The judgmental sampling method was used, and data collected was analyzed with Pearson Product Moment Correlation (PPMC) with the aid of Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) version 25.

V. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Testing of Hypotheses

Statement of Hypotheses 1:

HO1: There is no significant relationship between flexibility and marketing performance of telecommunication firms in Port Harcourt.

Table I: *Correlation between flexibility and marketing performance of telecommunication firms in Port Harcourt.*

		Fle	Mpr
Fle	Pearson Correction	1	.986**
	Sig (2 tailed)		.000
	N	40	40
Mpr	Pearson Correction	.986**	1
	Sig (2 tailed)	.000	
	N	40	40

** Correlation is significant at the 0.001 level (2-tailed)

Source: SPSS Output, 2023.

The result showed in table 1 the relationship between flexibility and marketing performance of telecommunication firms in Port Harcourt. With correlation coefficient of 0.986** and an alpha or p-value (p=0.000) less than 0.05 indicating that there is a significant relationship between flexibility and marketing performance of telecommunication firms in Port Harcourt.

Hence, the null hypothesis was rejected, that there is no significant relationship between flexibility and marketing performance of telecommunication firms in Port Harcourt. While the alternate hypothesis states that there is a significant relationship between flexibility and marketing performance of telecommunication firms in Port Harcourt was upheld.

Statement of Hypotheses 2:

HO2: There is no significant relationship between swiftness and marketing performance of telecommunication firms in Port Harcourt.

Table 2: *Correlation between swiftness and marketing performance of telecommunication firms in Port Harcourt.*

		Swi	Mpr
Swi	Pearson Correction	1	.982**
	Sig (2 tailed)		.000
	N	40	40
Mpr	Pearson Correction	.982**	1
	Sig (2 tailed)	.000	
	N	40	40

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)
 Source: SPSS Output, 2023.

The result as shown in table 2 revealed a significant relationship between swiftness and marketing performance of telecommunication firms in Port Harcourt. With the correlation coefficient of 0.932** and an alpha or p-value (sig) of less than 0.05 (p=0.000) indicating that there is a significant relationship between swiftness and marketing performance of telecommunication firms in Port Harcourt. The null hypothesis which states there is no significant relationship between swiftness and marketing performance of telecommunication firms in Port Harcourt was rejected. While the alternate hypothesis states there is a significant relationship between swiftness and marketing performance of telecommunication firms in Port Harcourt was upheld.

Statement of Hypotheses 3:

HO3: There is no significant relationship between alertness and marketing performance of telecommunication firms in Port Harcourt.

Table 3: *Correlation between alertness and marketing performance of telecommunication firms in Port Harcourt.*

		Ale	Mpr
Ale	Pearson Correction	1	.929**
	Sig (2 tailed)		.000
	N	40	40
Mpr	Pearson Correction	.929**	1
	Sig (2 tailed)	.000	
	N	40	40

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)
 Source: SPSS Output, 2023.

Table 3 showed the relationship between alertness and marketing performance alertness and marketing performance of telecommunication firms in Port Harcourt. With correlation coefficient of 0.929** and an alpha

or p-value ($p=0.000$) less than 0.05 indicating that there is a significant relationship between alertness and marketing performance of telecommunication firms in Port Harcourt. The null hypothesis states there is no significant relationship between alertness and marketing performance of telecommunication firms in Port Harcourt was rejected. While the alternate hypothesis which states there is a significant relationship between alertness and marketing performance of telecommunication firms in Port Harcourt.

Statement of Hypotheses 4:

HO4: There is no significant relationship between accessibility and marketing performance of telecommunication firms in Port Harcourt.

Table 4: *Correlations between accessibility and marketing performance of telecommunication firms in Port Harcourt.*

		Acc	Mpr
Acc	Pearson Correction	1	.900**
	Sig (2 tailed)		.000
	N	30	30
Mpr	Pearson Correction	.900**	1
	Sig (2 tailed)	.000	
	N	30	30

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

Source: SPSS Output, 2023.

The result on Table 4 showed the relationship between accessibility and marketing performance alertness and marketing performance of telecommunication firms in Port Harcourt. With correlation coefficient of 0.900** and an alpha or p-value ($p=0.000$) less than 0.05 indicating that there is a significant relationship between accessibility and marketing performance of telecommunication firms in Port Harcourt. The null hypothesis was rejected. While the alternate hypothesis which states there is a significant relationship between accessibility and marketing performance of telecommunication firms in Port Harcourt.

Table 5: *Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) Items*

		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig
Between People		945.378	39	24.240		
Within People	Between items	44.316	24	1.847	2.926	.000
	Residual	590.724	936	.631		
	Total	635.040	960	.661		
Total		1580.416	999	1.582		

Grand Mean = 2.3280

Source: SPSS Output 2023.

The table 5 showed the F-value of 2.2926 and p-value (sig) of less than 0.05 ($p=0.000$) which indicate that the predicting variables flexibility, swiftness, alertness and accessibility had significant relationship with marketing performance of telecommunication firms in Port Harcourt with a grand mean of 2.3280. It further implies that the dimension of the independent variable can be suitably relied upon to predict marketing performance of telecommunication firms in Port Harcourt.

VI. Discussion of Finding

Table 1 indicated the result showing the relationship between flexibility and marketing performance of telecommunication firms in Port Harcourt. With correlation coefficient of 0.986** and an alpha or p-value ($p=0.000$) less than 0.5 indicating that there is a significant relationship between flexibility and marketing performance of telecommunication firms in Port Harcourt. Hence, the null hypothesis was rejected, that there is no significant relationship between flexibility and marketing performance of telecommunication firms in Port Harcourt. While the alternate hypothesis states that there is a significant relationship between flexibility and marketing performance of telecommunication firms in Port Harcourt was upheld.

The result on Table 2 reveal swiftness and marketing performance of telecommunication firms in Port Harcourt. With correlation coefficient of 0.936** and an alpha or p-value (sig) less than 0.05($p=0.000$) indicating that there is a significant relationship between swiftness and marketing performance of telecommunication firms in Port Harcourt. The null hypothesis was rejected, while the alternate hypothesis states that there is a significant relationship between swiftness and marketing performance of telecommunication firms in Port Harcourt was upheld.

Table 3 showed the relationship between alertness and marketing performance of telecommunication firms in Port Harcourt. With correlation coefficient of 0.929** and an alpha or p-value ($p=0.000$) less than 0.05 indicating that there is a significant relationship between alertness and marketing performance of telecommunication firms in Port Harcourt was rejected. The null hypothesis states that there is a significant relationship between alertness and marketing performance of telecommunication firms in Port Harcourt rejected while the alternate hypothesis states that there is a significant relationship between alertness and marketing performance of telecommunication firms in Port Harcourt was upheld.

Table 4 showed the relationship between accessibility and marketing performance of telecommunication firms in Port Harcourt. With correlation coefficient of 0.900** and an alpha or p-value ($p=0.000$) of less than 0.05 indicating that there is a significant relationship between accessibility and marketing performance of telecommunication firms in Port Harcourt. The null hypothesis was rejected and states that there is no significant relationship between accessibility and marketing performance of telecommunication firms in Port Harcourt. While the alternate hypothesis which states that there is a significant relationship between accessibility and marketing performance of telecommunication firms in Port Harcourt was upheld.

VII. CONCLUSION

Based on the finding revealed, the study concluded that there is a statistical positive relationship between flexibility, swiftness, alertness, accessibility and marketing performance of MTN Communications, Airtel, Globacom Ltd and 9mobile Communication in Port Harcourt. Hence, supply chain agility has significant positive relationship with marketing performance which were measured in term of customer retention, customer acquisition and customer loyalty. This revealed that supply chain agility can be relied upon to accounts for marketing performance of telecommunication firms in Port Harcourt.

Based on the conclusion and findings, the following recommendations were made:

- i The management of telecommunication firms should adapt flexibility as core value to respond quickly to changing conditions as to gain competitive advantage and better marketing performance.
- ii The management of telecommunication firms should encourage and motivate members of staff to be swift in implementing critical decisions.
- iii The management of telecommunication firms in Port-Harcourt should build alertness and develop their adaptive capacity to changes and respond efficiently and effectively in a timely and cost-effective manner in the internal and external environments.
- iv The management of telecommunication firms should always provide necessary access to data as to encourage changes in the business environment that might impact on business to make necessary adjustment for good performance.

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