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Status of Competitor Market Orientations among Small and Medium Scale Enterprises in the South-South Geo-Political Zone of Nigeria

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Abstract:
Amidst several market orientation situations, in theory, this study evaluated the preponderance of competitor orientation among SMEs in the South-South Geopolitical zone of Nigeria. The competitor orientation behavioral pattern and the relative rank order positioning of the affirmative incidence index were analyzed. The status of competitor orientation exhibited and the managers and business profile of SMEs were ascertained. Moreover, competitor orientation inclination variation (COIV) was analyzed across the study area. Data for the study were obtained through a questionnaire administered on 663 SMEs selected through multi-stage sampling techniques. Descriptive statistics, incidence index, and composite analysis were adopted as the analytical tools for the study. The study's findings showed that most SMEs exhibited a high competitor orientation inclination variation index, implying that SMEs in the study area upheld competitor orientation tradition. Based on the managers' profile and business characteristics, it was further revealed that sex, age, educational qualification, business status, years of existence and value of assets did not influence competitor orientation of SMEs in the study area. The agriculture/agro-allied sector showed a high COIV mean index than those in manufacturing, mining, and other sectors. Hence, policy development must be recalibrated towards reviving other business sectors towards competitor orientation which will further enhance the creation of superior value for customers and sustainable business performance.

Keywords: Competitor orientation, market orientation, evaluation, small and medium scale enterprises, Nigeria

1. Introduction

Competitor orientation is an element of market orientation and suggests that a seller recognize the short-term weaknesses, strengths, and long-term capabilities and strategies of both the key, current, and potential competitors to attain sustainable performance (Narver & Slater, 1990). This component includes all regular activities, exercised information for short and long-term capabilities, and plans of both current and potential competitors in the target market. This component is done to assess their strengths relative to competitors to gain a competitive advantage (Blankson, Motwani & Levenburg, 2006). Hence, competitor-oriented enterprises are aware of the short and long-term capabilities of the key competitors. They give many efforts in creating advantage over competitors by responding rapidly to major competitor offers (Mahmoud & Hinson, 2012). According to Frambach, Prabhu, and Verhallen (2013), the aim of competitor orientation has to do with providing a strong foundation of intelligence regarding current and future competitors for strategic action. The business current and future competitors are found in firms with peculiar or non-peculiar production, technology platform. Firms are expected to adjust to market dynamics caused by competitors. Better understand the changing market needs since a competitor-oriented firm's objective is to keep pace with or remain ahead of competitors (Ledwith & O'Dwyer, 2009). Competitor-oriented firms develop a comprehensive evaluation of targeted and possible rivals and utilize the substantial awareness to beat the rivals and achieve sustainable competitive advantage and performance (Lopez, Poen & Ordas, 2005; Olson, Slater & Hult, 2005; O'dwyer & Gilmore, 2017). Strategically, the organization shares information about its rivals, which could help build a sustainable competitive advantage (Grinstein, 2008). Therefore, the significance of competitor orientation is monitoring the organization's current and predicted future competitors to develop an awareness of their information and strategies (Kaliappen & Hilman, 2013; Zhou, Brown, Dev & Agarwal, 2007).

SMEs play crucial roles in the development process in most of the developed and developing countries. They are characterized by dynamism, witty innovations, efficiency, and small size, allowing for a faster decision-making process. Over the years, there have been controversies in the literature concerning appropriate definitions of SMEs. Nigeria struggles to get a unified definition out of several inconsistent and ambiguous definitions proffered by several industries. Agencies, such as the 1992 review by the National Council on Industrial Standards, defined SMEs as enterprises with total

cost (including working capital but excluding the cost of land) above ₦31m but not exceeding ₦3,150m labor size of between 11 and 100 employees. The Federal Ministry of Industries defines a medium scale enterprise as any company with operating assets of less than 200 million and employing less than 300 persons. A small-scale enterprise (SSE), on the other hand, is one that has total assets of less than 50 million, with less than 100 employees. The National Economic Reconstruction Fund (NERFUND) defines an SSE as one whose total assets are less than 10 million but did not refer to its annual turnover or the number of employees. The 2012 Enterprise Baseline Survey reveals that SMEs in Nigeria employs over 32,414,884 indigenes of the nation and 58% of the global working population. SMEs constitute major avenues for income generation and participation in economic activities in the lower-income. Rural brackets of developing societies, especially in agriculture, trading, and services, contribute up to 46.7% of national GDP in nominal terms (Alochenu, 2014). The government and the private sectors had initiated several policies to sustain and promote SMEs' activities in Nigeria. Research still documents that 70% of SMEs fail in their first three years of operation in Nigeria (Akingbolu, 2014). According to SMEDAN (2012), about 80% of SMEs cannot survive up to the 5th year in business. This scenario has drawn the attention of the researchers. Possible explanations for this problem could be reasoned from competitor orientation. It is necessary to know if SMEs are continually re-evaluating their competitors' strengths and strategies. Therefore, the need to provide them with advice on managing their businesses better and position them competitively (Zatezalo & Gray, 2000). SMEs in Nigeria continue to face numerous problems, such as an unstable macro-economic environment. Therefore, it results in a costly operating environment due to high inflation and high import dependency, the high debt burden on the nation, lack of access to technology, and best breed business solutions.

Nigeria's business environment is situated amid a challenging economic landscape and intense competition. Businesses thus, increasingly seek strategic approaches to accomplish, improve and sustain organizational performance and competitive advantage. Competitor orientation means that a seller understands the short-term strengths and weaknesses and long-term capabilities and strategies of both the critical current potential competitors (Aaker, 1988; Day & Wensley, 1988; Porter, 1980, 1985). This knowledge of competitors enables identifying all available and developing technology collections and allows orientations timing on consumer's behavior and flourishes innovation of new product (Augusto & Coelho, 2009). Hence, attaining an organization's high performance relies on creating a stable competitive advantage and offering stable value for consumers. Performance assures the organization to set up and keep a kind of organizational culture that provides a required field for revealing necessary behaviors. Organizational cultural competitor orientation provides required behaviors for making the best value for customers and consequently sustain superior performance through maximal efficiency and effectiveness (Narver & Slater, 1990).

For SMEs, competition is a serious threat. However, a lack of resources (such as time and capital) often means they cannot afford to collect competitors' information. If they do, they lack the resources to react effectively. Successive governments repeated attempts to stimulate the SME sector's growth and development in Nigeria, and research still shows that 70% of SMEs fail in their first three years of operation in Nigeria (Akingbolu, 2014). Therefore, this study evaluates the extent of adoption of competitor orientation by SMEs in the South-South geopolitical zone, Nigeria. The competitor's orientation components were assessed in pattern and incidences, the level of competitor orientation was derived, and variability in business profile was decomposed.

2. Methodology

The study was conducted in the South-South zone of Nigeria. The South-South zone of Nigeria has an area of 236,768.99 sq. kilometers and an estimated human population of about 13,392,963 people with diverse cultures and languages. The South-South zone lies between latitude $9^0 32^1$ and $5^0 33^1$ north and latitude $14^0 25^1$ and $9^0 26^1$ east of the equator (Ibok, 2006 and NPC, 1992). The study population consisted of managers of all registered SMEs operating in the six states of Nigeria's South-South geopolitical zone. A database on registered SMEs provided by small and medium scale enterprises development agency of Nigeria (SMEDAN) 2012, all totaling about 3074 registered SMEs. A two-stage sampling procedure was adopted. A stratified random sampling technique was used to select a state from three pairs based on their geographical contiguity and cultural affiliation: Akwa Ibom/Cross River, Rivers/Bayelsa, and Delta/Edo. Thus, the following states were selected from each pair for the study; Akwa Ibom from the first pair, Rivers from the second pair, and Delta from the third pair. The second stage involved a simple random selection based on Krejcie and Morgan (1970) table for determining sample size for a finite population. Based on SMEDAN (2012) database, the Krejcie and Morgan table for determining sample size for a finite population were adopted to select 175 SMEs in Akwa Ibom state, 234 SMEs in Delta state, and 254 SMEs in Rivers State.

Therefore, 663 SMEs were used for the study to represent SMEs in the south-south geopolitical zone of Nigeria. Primary data were used for the study and were generated using a research questionnaire. The content validity was ensured based on a review of similar constructs from previous studies. The MKTOR scale by Narver and Slater (1990) on competitor orientation was adopted. Cronbach's Alpha value reveals a 0.805 reliability level for competitor orientation. A total of four hundred and thirty-two (432) copies of the questionnaire were correctly filled and returned, which formed our analysis. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics (incidence index, composite index) and inferential statistics (T-test, and One-Way Analysis of Variance).

3. Result and Discussions

3.1. Competitor Orientation Behavioral Pattern among SMEs in the South-South Zone, Nigeria

Competitor orientation is all about recognizing the strengths and weaknesses, abilities, and strategies of competitors so that the organization can react against their activities (Davies, 2000). The results pattern suggests a continuous understanding of the capabilities, potential, and current strategies of significant competitors among firms in the study area to create superior value for customers. The responses showed the variability in the firms' managers' behavior on each component of competitor orientation across the study area, as shown in Table 1. The results on the Incidence Index (II) and Relative Rank Order (RROP) column showed the proportion of firms that exhibit competitor orientation characteristics. Relatively Item 'a' which suggests monitoring of competitors marketing efforts as a competitive strategy was ranked as most exhibited function among the firms with an index value of 0.808 implying that 80.8% of the firms in the study area uphold this tradition. The next prominent attribute of competitor orientation was employees monitoring and reporting of competitors' activity as a competitive advantage strategy with an index of 0.611. 61.1% of the firms in the study area uphold this practice. Influence of the firms' activities showed an index of 0.527, implying that 52.7% of the firms' practice. The results indicate a satisfactory competitor orientation behavioral pattern among SMEs in the study area. SMEs in the study area are inherently competitive in their behavior towards adopting creative approaches to overcome their size constraints.

Item	Components of Competitor Orientation	Least of Me	Less of Me	More of Me	Typical of Me	II and RROP
a.	We monitor our competitors' marketing efforts to our own	3.9	15.0	55.6	25.2	0.808 1st
b.	Our employees are instructed to monitor and report on competitor activity.	9.5	29.4	40.7	20.4	0.611 2nd
c.	Our competitors' actions influence our activities.	15.0	32.2	40.7	12.0	0.527 3rd

Table 1: Distribution of SMEs According to II and RROP of Competitor Orientation
Note: N= 432 Respondents, II Means Incidence Index, and RROP Means Relative Rank Order

3.1.1. Status of Competitor Orientation Exhibited among SMEs

Following the various incidence distribution and relative ranking of the SMEs competitor orientation, categorizing the competitor orientation levels into ranges became expedient based on; low, moderate, and high. Assessing the status of competitor orientation demands ascertaining the estimated percentages of competitor orientation of each firm considered for this study. The competitor orientation index range estimated the proportion of competitor orientation based on the probabilistic value that ranged from 0.00 to 1.0, which implied virtually negligible to excellent. The competitor orientation level's distribution pattern was analyzed for meaningful interpretation using broadly categorized three ranges low, moderate, and high. The respondents were distributed across the three categories alongside their respective competitor orientation level frequencies and percentages. The comprehensive range of competitor orientation of firms in the study area stood at 51.2 percent. A quite negligible percentage of the study population (3.0%) was in the lowest category, which comprises about 13 firms in the study area, while 198 firms were in the moderate category with a percentage of 45.8%. The index range interpretation in Table 2 showed that the number of firms in the study area upholding the competitor orientation tradition is a little above average. The firms within the high category of competitor orientation exhibited less than 67% of competitor orientation in the study area. The level is not a very good level that can ensure sustainable enterprise performance. Firms seeking optimal organizational performance need to pay close attention to direct and indirect competitors to identify opportunities and build sustainable competitive businesses.

Competitor Orientation Index Range	Competitor Orientation Index Range Interpretation	Frequency	Percent
0.00-0.339	Low	13	3.0
0.34-0.669	Moderate	198	45.8
0.67-1.0	High	221	51.2
Total		432	100.0

Table 2: Distribution of SMEs according to Competitor Orientation Inclination Index

3.1.2. Profile Analyses of SMEs Competitor Orientation Inclination Variation (COIV)

3.1.2.1. Managers' Profile

Table 3 showed the manager's profile analyses of the SMEs Competitor Orientation Inclination Variation (COIV), taking cognizance of the location, gender, age, level of education, and business status. The distribution regarding location showed a high COIV mean index of 0.6971 for Rivers state, followed by Akwa Ibom with COIV mean index of 0.6873 and Delta state with COIV mean index of 0.6769. However, the variability of the COIV means index between the three states was not statistically significant. This result established that location was not found to influence SMEs' competitor orientation in the study area. Item 2 revealed that about 74.30% of managers of SMEs in the study area were male, as

against 25.70% female managers. However, it is interesting to note that female managers showed more COIV mean index than male managers. There was no statistical variability between managers' different sex, indicating that the study area's competitor orientation in the study area does not depend on managers' sex. Furthermore, managers within the age range of 23-34 years (44.90%) were found to be in the majority, followed by those of 35-46 years (43.50%), 47-58 years (10.00%), and 59-70 years (1.60%). The majority age range of managers falls within the active labor age with the advantage of physical and mental vigor to withstand the rigor associated with SME management. However, the variability of the COIV means index across the various age range was not statistically significant, indicating that the ages of managers do not influence SMEs' competitor orientation in the study area.

The level of education of managers of SMEs in the study area was also ascertained. It was established that managers with B.Sc. degree were in the majority (51.40%), followed by managers with HND (20.60%), SSCE (13.00%), OND (10.20%), NCE (3.50%), and FSLC (1.40%). Hence, most SMEs' managers in the study area are graduates, which supports the view that massive school turnout with the older generation still in paid employment forces these young graduates to be more involved in entrepreneurship (Shadare & Tunde, 2012). Though managers with NCE showed the highest COIV index, the variability in COIV mean index between the educational levels was not statistically significant. Competitor orientation of SMEs in the study area is not dependent on the educational qualification of managers. However, the variation might be caused by other factors such as experience. In terms of status in business, item 5 revealed that 34.50% of respondents were managers, 42.10% were actual business owners, while 23.40% were partners. A more significant percentage of SMEs (42.10%) in the study area were owned and managed by owners as sole proprietorship business (Mba & Cletus, 2014). The SMEs managed by the owners exhibited the highest COIV mean index (0.7042). However, the COIV mean index variation between the different business status was not statistically significant, meaning that SMEs' competitor orientation in the study area is not dependent on ownership or partnership.

Item	Manager's Profile	Mean COIV Index	Frequency	Percent	F-value	Sig value
1	Locations				.285	0.752 [nsig]
	Rivers	0.6971[a]	93	21.50		
	Akwa Ibom	0.6873 [a]	274	63.40		
	Delta	0.6769 [a]	65	15.00		
2	Sex				.231	0.631[nsig]
	Male	0.6856 [a]	321	74.30		
	Female	0.6944 [a]	111	25.70		
3	Age				.087	0.967[nsig]
	23-34	0.6903 [a]	194	44.90		
	35-46	0.6840 [a]	188	43.50		
	47-58	0.6957 [a]	43	10.00		
	59-70	0.6786 [a]	7	1.60		
4	Level of Education				1.514	0.184 [sig]
	FLSC	0.6111 [a]	6	1.40		
	SSCE	0.6637 [a]	56	13.00		
	OND	0.7121 [a]	44	10.20		
	NCE	0.7667 [a]	15	3.50		
	HND	0.6994 [a]	89	20.60		
	BSc	0.6813 [a]	222	51.40		
5	Status in the Business				1.555	0.212 [sig]
	Partner	0.6724 [a]	101	23.40		
	Owner	0.7042 [a]	182	42.10		
	Manager	0.6784 [a]	149	34.50		

Table 3: Showing the Managers Profile of SMEs Competitor Orientation Inclination Variation (COIV)

3.1.3. Business Characteristics

Table 4 shows the analysis of the business profile of SMEs competitor orientation inclination variation (COIV)., taking cognizance of the business sector, the legal status of SMEs, years of experience, and value of assets. The Agriculture/agro-allied sector has the highest COIV index of 0.7354 (item 1) compared to all other business sectors. However, the COIV mean index between the various business sectors wass statistically significant, indicating that SMEs' competitor orientation in the study area is significantly dependent on the nature of the business sector. The SMEs' legal status in the study area revealed that the majority were of sole proprietorship status (54.60%), implying that these SMEs are owned and managed by the owners (Mba & Cletus, 2014). Furthermore, the COIV mean index variation between SMEs' various status indicates that the competitor orientation of SMEs in the study area is not dependent on the legal status of the business. Despite the variability in the COIV mean index, the limited liability company, sole proprietorship, and partnership status of SMEs were not statistically different from SMEs' franchise status.

Moreover, the result indicated that most SMEs (85.60%) in the study area have only existed for about 3-17 years, while very few have lasted for about 18 to 47 years. Revealing that most SMEs in the study area become passive or eventually die within few years of existence while very few survive, thrive, and grow to maturity. However, the COIV mean index variation between SMEs based on years of existence further shows that SMEs competitor orientation has nothing to do with the years of existence. There was no statistical significance in the value of assets in the COIV mean index variation between SMEs, revealing that competitor orientation is not dependent on the SME's value of assets. However, the distribution of SMEs based on the value of assets showed that most of the SMEs in the study area have valued assets below ₦10,000,000, explaining why most SMEs in Nigeria are stifled.

Item	Business Characteristics	Mean COIV Index	Frequency	Percent	Fvalue	Sig
1	Business Sector				2.619	0.024 [sig]
	Agriculture/Agro-allied	0.7354 [b]	57	13.2		
	Manufacturing	0.7074 [b]	47	10.9		
	Mining	0.5556 [a]	9	2.1		
	Services, Trade/Distribution, Health, Hospitality, Educational	0.6770 [b]	290	67.1		
	Traditional Arts/Craft	0.7121 [b]	11	2.5		
	Multi-sectoral	0.7130 [b]	18	4.2		
2	Legal Status of SME				1.371	0.251 [nsig]
	limited liability company	0.6932 [b]	110	25.5		
	sole proprietorship	0.6900 [b]	236	54.6		
	Partnership	0.6895 [b]	73	16.9		
	Franchise	0.5962 [a]	13	3		
3	Years of Experience				1.295	0.275 [nsig]
	Mar-17	0.6854 [a]	370	85.6		
	18-32	0.6883 [a]	50	11.6		
	33-47	0.7639 [a]	12	2.8		
4	Value of Assets				1.149	0.324 [nsig]
	less than 500000	0.6804	254	58.8		
	500001-1000000	0.7186	53	12.3		
	1000001-1500000	0.75	21	4.9		
	1500001-2000000	0.6131	14	3.2		
	2000001-2500000	0.7685	9	2.1		
	2500001-3000000	0.6667	23	5.3		
	3000001-3500000	0.6667	6	1.4		
	3500001-4000000	0.6917	10	2.3		
	4000001-4500000	0.5833	1	0.2		
	4500001-5000000	0.7042	20	4.6		
	5000001 and above	0.6706	21	4.9		

Table 4: Showing the Business Profile of SMEs Competitor Orientation Inclination Variation (COIV)

4. Conclusion

This study was conceptualized to evaluate the extent of inclination to competitor orientation by SMEs in Nigeria's South-South geopolitical zone. Competitor orientation can lead to sustainable business performance. The result showed that the level and incidence index pattern of competitor orientation inclination among SMEs varies in intensity across Nigeria's south-south zone. The majority of SMEs exhibited a high competitor orientation inclination variation (COIV) mean index range of 0.67-1.0, affirming high competitor orientation, while 45.8% within the index range of 0.34-0.669 indicated moderate competitor orientation.

Furthermore, the SMEs showed a reasonable competitor orientation level by a continuous understanding of the capabilities, potential, and current significant competitors' strategies in the study area. In terms of the managers' profile and business characteristics, SMEs' competitor orientation in the study area was not influenced by the location, sex, age, and educational qualification of the managers and the business status, years of existence, and value of assets. Furthermore, the result revealed that the nature of the business sector significantly influenced SMEs' competitor orientation in the study area as those in the agriculture/agro-allied sector showed a high competitor orientation inclination variation mean index in the manufacturing, mining, and other sectors. Therefore, policy development must be recalibrated towards reviving other business sectors towards competitor orientation. Policy development will enhance superior value creation for customers and sustainable business performance.

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