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Advantage in Nigerian Pharmaceutical Industry

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Abstract

The study empirically tested the relationship between core competencies and competitive advantage in organizational performance. According to the literature, core competencies and competitive strategies are crucial factors in organizational productivity or performance but the focus of this study is to determine whether core competencies lead to better competitive advantage for firms to reposition themselves in face of daunting economic challenges in business environment. The study was conducted by qualitative examination of objective and subjective data sourced from journals, articles, internets and books. The data obtained supported the previous researchers' hypotheses implying a positive relationship between core competencies and competitive advantage. Several implications for management and policy are also discussed in light of the findings of this study. It was concluded that, managers must view their organizations as bundles of competencies which have to be continuously managed for gaining a competitive advantage. The study recommended that the management of core competencies, which is critical to an organization's sustained success, should be a conscious effort on any firm, rather than something to be left to chance.

Key Words: Core Competency, Competitive Advantage, Competitive Strategy, Managerial Competence

Introduction

Core competency theory is the theory of strategy that determines steps to be taken by firms to achieve competitive advantage in the marketplace. The conceptualization of core competency states that firms must explore the areas of their strengths or capacities in which they have competencies (Jeneja, 2008). In addition, the theory also prescribes the role core competency must play taking into cognizance the fact that it must be difficult for competitors to imitate,

hence it is reusable across the markets that the firm serves and the products it makes, thus adding merit to the end user or the buyer who derive satisfaction from it.

Business organizations are continuously striving for ways to attain a sustainable competitive advantage. They need to count more on their internal dominant strengths to provide more added customer value, strong distinction and adaptability; in other word they count more on their “core competencies” and in turn coordinate diverse production skills and integrate multiple streams of technologies thus achieving a distinctive advantage (Nimsith, Munas & Shibly; 2017). Hence, strategy has to move from competing for product or service management to competing in core competence management (Ljungquist, 2007). Management occurs within any type of organizational context where human and physical resources are combined to achieve certain objectives. The core competence has to be a primary factor for strategy formulation as it is an important source of profitability. Technically, core competence is the production of a product or service with unique value to customers. Firms might have core competence in marketing with its capability to access and manage markets in a unique way (Markhloufi & Al-Erja 2017).

Core competence, therefore, refers to distinctive capabilities of an organization that describe excellence performance, contributes to customer value, and difficult to imitate (Baker, Pearson & Chipman; 2009). Alternatively, a core competency is a deep proficiency that enables a company to deliver unique value to customers. It embodies an organization’s collective learning, particularly of how to coordinate diverse production skills and integrate multiple technologies (Rhee, Parent & Basu, 2013).

By addressing issues related to organization productivity, the subject “competencies” has gained force in the contemporary literature, encouraging a reflection regarding the key factors in the creation of value for organizations and individuals (Fleury & Fleury, 2001). The competence concept originally dates 1950’s, where distinctive competencies was described by Selznick (in Bhamra, Dani & Bhamra; 2011) as firm-specific features not possessed by competitors. However, core competencies have grown significantly to become internal traits of a firm; they are skills and understandings that are accumulated over time; which gives a firm an advantage in the marketplace by satisfying a customer need better than a competitor (described by Gorman & Thomas in Edgar, 2008). Core competencies are resources and capabilities that serve as a source of competitive advantage for a firm over its rivals. Competencies act as a linkage between the firm’s internal resources and the current environment. Though two firms might have the same resources, employing these resources to meet market needs will make one firm successful and the other not so. The role of competence building in a firm is therefore of utmost importance (Kabue & Kilika, 2016).

Building an effective competitive strategy requires an understanding of competitive advantage, which is what sets an organization apart—that is, its distinctive edge (Abell, Felin, & Foss, 2008; Felin & Hesterly, 2007). That distinctive edge can come from the organization’s core competencies by doing what others cannot do or doing it better than others can do it. If a business is able to continuously improve the quality and reliability of its products or services through quality management of its resources and core competencies, it may have a competitive advantage that cannot be taken away in the market place (Johnson & Scholes, 2002). The resource-based view of the firm emphasized that a sustainable competitive advantage generates

from firm's possession of unique resources and difficult to imitate knowledge, skills, and competencies by competitors.

In order to create strategic competitive advantages and remain in business, organizations have to evolve ways and develop means of strengthening and utilizing employee core competencies in the management of talent. Some studies reveal that competencies can distinguish and differentiate an organization from its competitors and that's while two organizations may be alike in financial results; the way in which the results were achieved could be different based on the competencies that fit their particular strategy and organizational culture (Barney, 2001).

A cardinal point of strategic management is to develop and sustain competitive advantages of a corporation, which should make it feasible to attain outstanding results of its business pursuits (Cegliński, 2016). Hence, the expansion of competitive advantage is comparable to attainment of success by a particular organization. Within the contemporary meaning, the term competitive advantage was coined by Porter in 1985 (Porter, 1985). Competitive advantage is achieved when a company builds or acquires a set of qualities that allow it to transcend its competitors (Wang, 2014). Alternatively, competitive advantage is displayed, when activities of a specific firm are more commercially successful than those of its market competitors or when it outshines them as regards other remarkable results of occupation (Huff, Floyd, Sherman & Terjesen 2009), including, for example, the share in the market, product quality or technological advancement. Inherently, a lot of business organizations are not able to exceed such prescribed standards (Huff et al., 2009). This results in assigning features of uniqueness and exceptionality to competitive advantages. Therefore, they can be treated as an indispensable condition for achievement of success, i.e. attainment of strategic goals (Haffer, 2003).

A competency model is "a list of competencies which are derived from observing satisfactory or outstanding employee performance for a specific task" and are used to categorize competencies for common use (Draganidis & Menzsaz, 2006). Understanding core competencies allows companies to invest in the strengths that differentiate them and set strategies that unify their entire organization. (Chen, Yu-fen & Wu, 2007) described core competence as the ability to operate efficiently within the business environment and to respond to challenges. Companies are likely to be different in terms of their abilities to select, build, deploy, and protect these core competencies. These differences are likely to yield differences in organizations' productivity (Macmillan & Tompo; 2000).

The need to establish higher levels of productivity and competitiveness stimulates a reflection on the factors affecting the individual's effectiveness and efficiency in the work environment (Trank, Rynes, & Bretz, 2002). Employees should be held accountable for their performance. Assigning work authority without responsibility and accountability can create opportunities for abuse. Managers with well-trained and experienced employees can function well with a wider span of efficient and effective employee control and this result in greater organizational productivity (Ployhart, 2006). Other contingency variables that determine the appropriate span or core competencies include similarity and complexity of employee tasks, the physical proximity of subordinates, the degree of standards control that are in place, the sophistication of the organization information system, the strength of the organization culture, and the preferred style of manager (Van Fleet, 1983).

The sustainability of competitive advantage depends on three most critical variables: Durability; which is the period over which a competitive advantage is sustained,

Transferability; the harder a resource is to transfer the higher sustainable the competitive advantage, and finally Replicability; means cannot be replicated or purchased from a market (Sadler, 2003). Researchers such as (Gupta, Woodside, Dubelaar, & Bradmore, 2009) pointed out, that resources alone are basically not enough to create competitiveness over other firms. For a purpose of creating a competitive advantage, an organization should effectively exploit their resources and explore their capability to grow over time, to create new resources, such as skills (through new technology or software application), new product development. A firm tends to have a competitive advantage when it is implementing a value creating strategy which not implemented by current or potential competitors. Thus, to obtain competitive advantage a business strategy of a firm manages the variety of resources over which it has direct control and these resources can create a sustainable competitive advantage (Rijamampianina, Abratt, & February, 2003).

More importantly, some researchers have focused on the stages growth of competitive advantage that generated by firms and its effects on the firm success. However, Kotelnikov (2004) has described three types of competitive advantage namely, Basic Competitive Advantage (BCA) which considered the extent of firm's capability to operate and compete in the global market; Revealed Competitive Advantage (RCA) which is indicated by a firm's market share; and the Sustainable Competitive Advantage (SCA) which allowed a firm to keep and advance its competitive position in the current market.

Research Methodology

Population of Study

The study population includes 333 respondents comprising managers at various levels and other employees in some selected pharmaceutical companies, namely: Africa Consumer Care Plc, Unilever Plc, Glaxosmithkline Plc, Procter and Gamble, and Healthline Ltd. 182 out of the 333 larger population filled and returned their questionnaires, a breakdown of the figures was presented in table 1.

Table 1: Number of Respondents from Five Pharmaceutical Industries in Lagos, Nigeria

Company	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
African Consumer Care Plc	48	26.37	26.37	26.37
Procter & Gamble	14	7.69	7.69	34.06
Unilever	64	35.17	35.17	69.23
Health line	9	4.95	4.95	74.18
Glaxo Smith Kline	47	25.82	25.82	100.0
Total	182	100.0	100.0	

Sampling Technique and Sample Size

The sample size was drawn from a sampling frame of questionnaires administered to managers at various level and other employees of some selected pharmaceutical companies in Lagos State. The sample of this research was calculated using Taro Yamane (Yamane, 1973) formula with 95% confidence level. The calculation formula of Taro Yamane is presented as follows:

$$n = \frac{N}{1+N(e)^2}$$

Where:

n = sample size required
 N = number of people in the population
 e = allowable error (%)

Substitute numbers in formula:

$$n = \frac{333}{1+333(0.05)^2}$$

n = 182

Validity and Reliability of Research Instrument

The questions in the questionnaire associated with the components of managerial competencies and core competencies' types influencing competitive advantage were observed in company operations, customer preferences and purchasing behaviour of toothpastes brands to present such in competitiveness resulting in a greater competitive advantage. To ensure the reliability of the tool, Cronbach's alpha was extracted reliability coefficient, for the dimensions of core competencies and competitive advantage. Cronbach's coefficients alpha was chosen since the Likert scale is not continuous, but an ordinal categorical scale. Although, Cronbach's coefficients alpha remains affected by skewness, however, increased sample sizes help improve the accuracy, bias, or precision of using it with non-normal data. Hence, the reliability at the level of $\alpha = 0.737$. If the value of α is more than 0.737 then the questionnaire is acceptable. The validity was done by ensuring that the structured questionnaires followed the research of experts in related fields.

All the variables were measured using the Likert 5-point scale.

Strongly agree	5
Agree	4
Undecided	3
Disagree	2
Strongly disagree	1

The Statistical Package for Social Sciences program, (IBM SPSS Statistics 23) was used to extract the results, and through statistical treatments that included statistics duplicates, the percentages, arithmetic mean and standard deviation were determined; while the Cronbach's alpha measures the internal consistency of the instrument.

Data Analysis

The data analysis was done by descriptive statistics stating the frequency, percentage, mean, median, standard deviation, sample variance and skewness of the sampled data with the results of the analysis presented in histograms and tables while inferential statistics – ANOVA was

used to determine whether significant difference existed between groups, with Chi-square test and Linear Regression employed for the test of hypotheses.

Results and Discussion

Table 2: Number of Respondents from Five Pharmaceutical Industries in Lagos State

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
African Consumer Care Plc	48	26.37	26.37	26.37
Procter & Gamble	14	7.69	7.69	34.06
Unilever	64	35.17	35.17	69.23
Health line	9	4.95	4.95	74.18
Glaxo Smith Kline	47	25.82	25.82	100.0
Total	182	100.0	100.0	

Socio-Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

Table 3: Distribution of Respondents by Socio-Demographic Characteristics

	Variable	Frequency	Percentage
Education Level	B.Sc	54	29.67
	Higher Diploma	59	32.42
	Masters	40	21.99
	Ph.D	03	1.65
	Others	26	14.27
	Total	182	100.00
Position	Top Level Manager	09	4.95
	Middle Level Manager	58	31.87
	Low Level Manager	63	34.62
	Others	52	28.57
	Total	182	100.00

Source: Field Survey, 2019

The data obtained on the education level of the respondents presented in table 3 showed their understanding of core competencies and competitive advantage as demonstrated in their ability to answer the questions in the questionnaires. A greater percentage of respondents, (i.e. 85.73%), attended higher institutions, with 62.09% among them possessing a university degree, and (23.64%) held a postgraduate degree while 71.44% are managers in their various firms. This result confirmed that core competencies and competitive advantage skills were adequately

taught in the universities attended by majority of the managers and employees of the selected pharmaceutical companies.

Effect of Core Competencies on Competitive Advantage

Table 4: Descriptive Statistics of 182 Respondents on Relationship between Core Competencies and Competitive Advantage

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error	95% Confidence Interval for Mean		Minimum	Maximum
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound		
Top Level Manager	9	4.189	.330	.1099	3.936	4.442	3.60	4.50
Middle Level Manager	58	4.112	.321	.0422	4.028	4.197	3.20	4.70
Low Level Manager	63	4.137	.317	.0400	4.057	4.216	3.10	5.00
Others	52	4.125	.266	.0369	4.051	4.199	3.10	4.70
Total	182	4.128	.304	.0225	4.084	4.172	3.10	5.00

From the data obtained based on the responses of the respondents regarding the relationship between core competencies and competitive advantage in their company, this has a mean statistic of 4.128 and a standard deviation of 0.304. Since the mean lies between the lower and upper confidence limits of 4.084 and 4.172 respectively at 5% significance (see Table 4), it can be deduced that majority of the respondents agreed to the statements that there is a strong relationship between core competencies and competitive advantage with majority describing their core competencies as unique, collective, strategically flexible, hard, specific and create sustainable competitive advantage. Thus, contributing significantly to perceive customer benefits and integrates multiple streams of technologies – a product differentiation resulting in competitive advantage.

Moreover, the One-way ANOVA test performed on the data showed that there was no statistically significant difference between means and within groups with $F(3/178) = 0.190$ and $p = 0.903$.

Table 5: ONE-WAY ANOVA showing the Relationship Between Core Competence and Competitive Advantage

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	.053	3	.018	.190	.903
Within Groups	16.614	178	.093		
Total	16.667	181			

Relationship between Managerial Competencies and Product Differentiation

Table 6: Chi-Square Tests showing the relationship between shared vision and Product Differentiation

	Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	52.989 ^a	44	.166
Likelihood Ratio	57.960	44	.077
Linear-by-Linear Association	12.097	1	.001
N of Valid Cases	182		
a. 48 cells (80.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is .05.			

Shared/strategic vision and product differentiation is accepted based on the large value of chi square test statistics ($\chi^2 = 52.989$) and its low probability ($p = 0.001$ or < 0.05), see table 6.

Moreover, table 7, showed that a majority of the respondents (i.e. 115 out of 182) across the five toothpaste industries agreed to all the issues under shared/strategic vision as contained in the questionnaire, thus scoring a 4 or a 5; leading to higher product quality, new product innovation, unique product features and exclusive product design which yielded sustainable competitive advantage.

Table 7: Crosstabulation Showing Responses on Shared Vision in the selected Pharmaceutical industries

Count

		Response Ratings on Statement											Total	
		2.25	2.50	2.75	3.00	3.25	3.50	3.75	4.00	4.25	4.50	4.75		5.00
Industry	AFCC	1	1	2	2	7	12	2	8	7	3	2	1	48
	P & G	0	0	0	1	1	1	0	6	4	0	1	0	14
	Unilever	0	0	1	1	1	7	13	17	11	9	4	0	64
	Healthline	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	4	2	1	1	0	9
	GSK	0	0	0	0	3	8	2	11	13	6	2	2	47
Total		1	1	3	4	13	28	17	46	37	19	10	3	182

Relationship between Cooperation and Product Differentiation

The null hypothesis test ran on One-way ANOVA showed that there was no statistically significant difference between groups and within groups of the means. While, $F(3/178) = 1.514$, $p = 0.212$

Table 8 **ANOVA**
Mean Ratings on Cooperation and Product Differentiation

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	.975	3	.325	1.514	.212
Within Groups	38.189	178	.215		
Total	39.163	181			

(see 8). Since $p > 0.05$, hence, the statements are generally accepted by managers and other employees across the selected five toothpaste industries. Hence, the alternative hypothesis is rejected.

Impact of Core Competencies on Competitive Advantage

Table 9: **ANOVA**
Impact of Core Competencies on Competitive Advantage

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	43.485	18	2.416	1.096	.360
Within Groups	359.246	163	2.204		
Total	402.731	181			

The ANOVA test performed on the obtained data showed a p value of 0.360 (table 9). This showed that there was no statistically significant difference between group means and within groups. This resulted in an F-value of 1.096 (i.e. $F(18/163) = 1.096$). Since $p > 0.05$ the null hypothesis is accepted.

Moreover, a chi square test ran on the same data has a large value of chi-square statistics ($\chi^2 = 79.786$) with an appreciable probability of 0.014 (i.e. $p < 0.05$). This large χ^2 -value indicates that

Table 10: **Chi-Square Tests**

	Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	79.786 ^a	72	.248
Likelihood Ratio	75.436	72	.368
Linear-by-Linear Association	6.042	1	.014
N of Valid Cases	182		

- a. 85 cells (89.5%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is .05.

The observed data are unlikely under an assumption of no association between the variables, hence the variables are dependent on each other; moreover, the p-value < 0.05 (see table 4.2.15) showed that the data are dependent, leading to the acceptance of the null hypothesis and suggesting that core competence has significant impact on competitive advantage in pharmaceutical industries in Lagos State.

Table 11: Coefficients^a

	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
(Constant)	5.546	1.042		5.320	.000
Core Competencies	.761	.305	-.183	-2.493	.014

Table 12: Model Summary

R	R ²	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
.183 ^a	.033	.028	1.471

Alternatively, the linear regression performed on the same data (see tables 11 and 12), showed a p value of 0.014 (i.e. $p < 0.05$) suggesting no correlation between the independent variable and the dependent variable, this implies that some of the examined pharmaceutical industries are yet to explore their core competencies to gain a competitive advantage. However, the variables are statistically significant due to its appreciable F value (i.e. $F(1/180) = 6.216$, see table 13) which represent the mean change in the dependent variable (competitive advantage) given a one-unit shift in the independent variable (core competencies). This implies that, although the data has a low R²-value (i.e. $R^2 = 0.033$), the regression model is a good one, since the study focuses on organizational core competencies, and this research field has an inherently greater amount of unexplainable variation, due to the fact that employees in the organization are just harder to predict than things like physical resource.

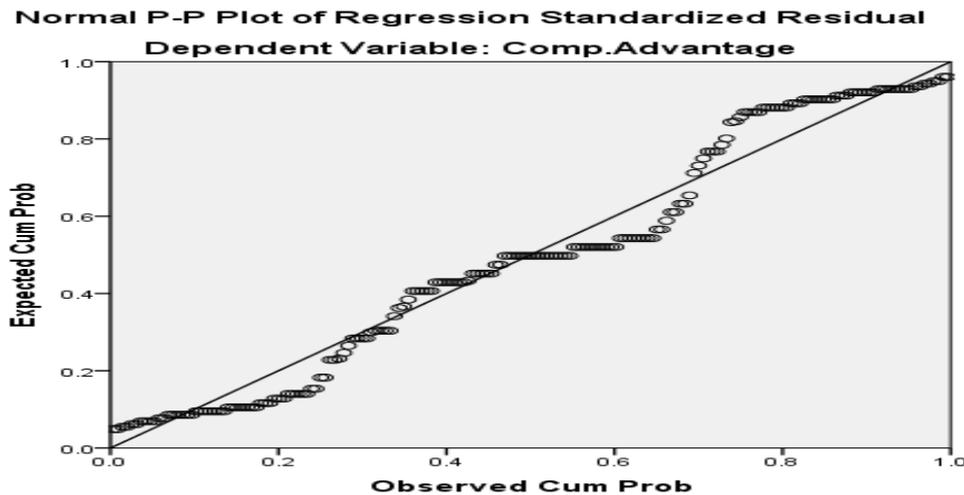
Table 13: ANOVA

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Regression	.001	1	13.443	6.216	.014 ^b
Residual	402.730	180	2.163		
Total	402.731	181			

Moreover, the value of the coefficient of the standard error, $S = 1.417$, signifying that the distances between the data points and the fitted values are smaller. Hence, approximately 95% of the data points lies between the regression line ± 2.942 , this value gives précised

predictions of the regression model. Hence, there is insufficient evidence in the sample to conclude that a non-zero correlation exists between corecompetencies and competitive advantage. Thus, as the independent variable increases, the dependent variables also increase.

Moreover, the normal P-P plot of regression standardized residual on the variables showed that the predicted probabilities did not deviate from the observed probabilities.



Conclusion

Core competency concept is closely related to competitive advantage due to its value enhancing characteristics (Newbert, 2008). It is considered the firms' most important resource (Srivastava, 2005) for creating a sustainable competitive advantage. Hence, understanding core competencies allows companies to invest in the strengths that differentiate them and set strategies that unify their entire organization thus building a long-term competitive advantage (Ordóñez de Spablos, 2004).

Moreover, Srivastava (2005) also reported that possession of core competencies will not result in a competitive advantage by itself; rather it is the successful identification, nurturing, development and deployment of the core competencies that is important for adding value to a firm. Certainly, the result obtained from the data indicated that majority of the respondents, mostly managers; of the selected toothpaste industries understood core competencies. However, there exists an apparent and a dearth of understanding of what core competencies are among other employees in the companies. But this drawback is overcome by a greater number of their managers having a deep knowledge of core competencies. Hence, this study concludes that there is a deep understanding of core competencies across the selected toothpaste industries.

Drawing from the findings, this study further concluded that the respondents' deep knowledge of core competencies gave their companies access in entering new markets with unique product design, higher product quality and greater product innovation resulting in significant product differentiation. This supported the claim that their core competencies guided their firms when growing eccentricity in turning out greater output resulting in broad economy of scale; this enabled each firm to create new business areas when entering new market.

A deep knowledge of managerial competencies and social ability is therefore, strongly needed in the selected pharmaceutical companies for the attainment of a high level of service delivery and capability often exceeding expectation while supporting groups or teams training, coaching and sharing specialist knowledge to gain business expansion and maintain low average costs.

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