NICHE MARKETING AND OPERATIONAL PERFORMANCE IN THE NIGERIAN MANUFACTURING INDUSTRY: A STUDY OF NESTLE NIGERIA PLC. LAGOS

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Abstract

This study examined niche marketing and organisational performance in the Nigerian manufacturing industry with a focus on Nestle Nigeria Plc. Lagos. To achieve this goal, four research questions were answered and four hypotheses were tested. The cross-sectional survey research design was adopted. The population of the consisted of one hundred and twenty-five (125) staff comprising 45 senior staff and 80 middle levels at marketing department of the company. The stratified random sampling technique was employed in the selection of the sample size. A structured questionnaire was designed by the researcher which was administered to the respondents for the collection of data. Frequency counts and percentages were used to analyze both the demographic data and research questions while regression correlation was used to test the hypotheses at 0.05level of significance. The findings of the study showed that application of niche marketing is valuable in achieving Nestle marketing objectives, serves as form of strategy to achieve sustainable growth, has significant impact on customers' patronage of Nestle products and improve sales performance of Nestle Nigeria Plc products. Based on the findings, the study concluded that niche marketing is a potent strategy for improving sales performance of business organisations. On the basis of the findings, the study recommends the adoption of niche strategy as a potent strategy for effective cost control to support an underserved population so as to enhance business performance and competitive advantage.

Keywords: Niche Marketing, Organisational performance, promotional strategy, manufacturing industry.

Background to the Study

The strive towards improved market share has made many business organisations to adopt cut-throat marketing strategies to aggressive improve on their product offerings and ensure that they maneuver and succeed in the vastly sophisticated marketing environment. On the basis of the above, manufacturing organizations carefully ensure in-depth analysis concerning what the consuming public wants and fashion out ways through which their product offerings can satisfactorily meet the needs and expectations of their teeming customer. According to Howard (2012), every business needs elements of business or marketing strategy to outsmart its competitors and ensure that effective service delivery (Howard, 2012).

It is just on this note that a number of concepts, one of which is niche marketing was advocated. Niche marketing is an integral aspect of competitive marketing from which businesses can acquire potential clients and align the needs and expectations of customers by proving support to the underserved segments of the population (Nagashima, 2013). Anzaku and Salau (2017) corroborating Jarvis and Goodman (2013) believes that niche marketing explores the need and importance of smaller portions of large markets, with an emphasis on optimizing business opportunities through the use of product, market or corporate features which corporations turn into value differentiation for profitability, consumer fulfillment or competitive advantage.

Agbonifoh, Ogwo, Nnolim and Nkamnebe (2007) stated that niche marketing is a strategy that is used to help management in breaking overall consumer demand into comparatively homogeneous sets that are customer-oriented and have unique market segmentations. This is because it first considers the client (consumers) desires and wishes in a sub-market and then determine marketing mix that is most feasible to fulfill those needs. Niche marketing is a potent strategy in the Nigerian business environment. Nigeria is a nation made up of people of varied socio-economic characteristics, ranging from race, culture, belief, faith, food, clothes to social status. Thus, any organization that intends to maintain effective cost control should incorporate niche marketing in its marketing planning strategy. This is because, a firm with effective niche marketing would find it easy to survive stiff competition among its rivals, while those that ignore niche marketing may find it difficult to compete with companies producing or marketing similar products (Anzaku & Salau 2017).

In field of operations management, operational effectiveness is a way of enhancing operational performance and finally financial performance. The operating performance in term of efficiency of industries across sectors has long been the focus of attention of academics and business practitioners. This is largely due to the fact that it serve as the basis for improving financial performance of firms, to evaluate the influence of market structure on performance and, consequently, to maintain the stability of the corporate system (Berger & Mester, 1997). A number of industry specific and general factors such as the ongoing efforts to control costs, the progressive growth of customer changing needs and expectations and the associated risk new product development have made the investigation of operating performance in the food and beverages industry a more pertinent issue now than before.

Theoretical Framework
This section addresses the theories behind this research, such as the strategic model of action (Hagedorn, 1993), the principle of mutual interaction (Barney, 1991) and the entire theory of systems (Porter, 1985).

Strategic Behaviour Model
The strategic activity is essentially decisions that take into account future responses of others, according to Hagedorn (1993). Strategic activity occurs when few market participants are enough active that their decisions independently and where one participant's behavior affects the other participants' choices. Strategic activity is the

generic term for acts taken by businesses that are meant to manipulate the dynamic business climate. Strategic activity covers steps to influence competitors to comply, to maximize mutual profits and non-cooperative activities to boost business profits at the expense of competitors. The strategic behavior model stresses the strategic fit between the company's target with an apparent orientation of corporate justification and consumer strategy. The role of such a philosophy is determined by how an organization suits the particular criteria and competitive capabilities of the sector. The logic of the distinction of market segments, which involves specific value formation, was developed in this theory.

Literature Review
Defining Nich Marketing

Isoraite (2009) sees niche marketing as a marketing approach that is formed passionately by tailoring marketing campaign for a particular consumer segment that has a high potential to meet the value delivered with respect to brand, product or service. The implication of the above is that must be adequately guided and treated as potential ey to gaining competitive advantage. Schani and Chalasani (2014) distinguished between niche marketing and market segmentation. They defined the market segmentation as a top-down strategy, which says that a major market is being split into smaller and more manageable submarkets. Niche marketing on the other hand is a downward strategy, meaning that the marketer begins with the needs of a few clients and eventually establishes a wider consumer base according to Shani and Chalasani (2014). Linneman and Stanton (2012) offer an outline of the real niche marketing, namely the breaking of conventional markets into smaller segments and the planning for each of those small segments or niches of a particular marketing programme.

Niche marketing has many motives, but much of the justification is for making more gains. The niche riches Linneman and Stanton (2012) reported. In 2012, the outcomes of investment from small markets were 27%, compared with 11% for returns on capital from big markets. Linneman and Stanton (2012) find this to be an evidence of this. Kotler (2003) further states that niche marketing is so advantageous because the organization understands its clients so well that they have the capability to satisfy their needs. McKenna (2011) says niche commercialization relies on word-of-mouth references. Opinions of people play a decisive part in the success of a commodity.

Operational performance can be defined as the measurable features of the consequences of a firm's procedures, consisting of reliability, production sequence time, and inventory levels. Operational performance in turn influences a number of business performance measures like market share and degree of customer satisfaction (Voss, Ahlström, & Blackmon, 1997). Besides, operational efficiency is contemplated as a vital quality management practices. Operational performance is conceptualized as the strategic elements of competing companies and comprises of operational level signs, like degree of flexibility and pace of delivery (Chavez, Yu, Gimenez, Fynes, & Wiengarten, 2015). Operational performance has been viewed as the strategic scopes in which firms choose to compete. Improve operational

performance can upsurge customer degree of satisfaction through high-quality products and improve service delivery. The most common approaches to evaluate operational performance are: delivery, flexibility, cost, and inventory. (Lau, Lee, & Jung, 2018, Santos, Lannelongue, Gonzalez-Benito, 2019). Delivery denotes performance measure relating to the capability to deliver superior products to clients (Chavez, et al., 2015). Flexibility is defined as company's capability to react to market demands by substituting one product to another through harmonized policies and action plans (Shou, Hu, Kang, Li, & Park, 2018). The cost element, which is always related with operational efficiency, highlights cost savings and growing profits (Chavez, et al., 2015). Effective inventory management can assist companies lessen stocks and associated inventory cost. Consequently, goods can be transported to clients in a short time, leading to additional benefits (Prajogo, Toy, Bhattacharya, Oke, & Cheng, 2018). According to Al-Shboul, Barber, Garza-Reyes, Kumar, Abdi, and Steenhuis (2017), a number of previous empirical research highlighted two major inadequacies considering the four dimensional structure of operational performance. Firstly, the assessment of these dimensions was suggested in a set of question items (Al-Shboul et al., 2017).

Empirical Review
Marketers around the world have acknowledged that a single offering cannot purely satisfy the urge or desire of the teeming customers or target audience since the markets consist of separate clients, sub-markets or divisions which have different criteria, perceptions and preferences Wright (2013). Segmentation and customer analysis at this point is a huge determinant factor for effective niche marketing so that customers desired needs can be met (O'Cass & Ngo, 2011; Goldstein, 2012; Hamermesh, 2013; Irving, 2014). Hammer (2012) opined that niche marketing is a tactic to improve demand growth and diversification, and keep manufacturing industries competitive and profitable.

Pankajkumar, Anawade and Sharma (2022) in their study on the influence of Marketing strategy on Business results among SMEs elicited information from 103 respondents using correlation and regression analysis found out that clients need to be provided with effective service delivery so that unique advantages can be felt by them.

Al- Abdallah, G and Al- Salim, M (2021) in their study titled 'Green Innovation and Competitive advantage; an empirical study of Chemical industrial Plants in Jordanian qualified industrial zone elicited information from 219 Jordanian firms found out that firms' resource has a statistically significant positive moderation effect on the relationship between product innovation and competitive advantage Aliyu (2017) and Akbar, Omar, Wadood &Tasmin (2017) however also concluded in their studies that niche marketing can boost global education, science and technology for sustainable development as a vehicle for growth and development and that the increasing, profiting and sustainability of every company independent of policy is based on how much customers want and need their goods or services to serve and that this can inverse improve global education.

The effect of niche marketing policy on Nigerian selected manufacturing companies was investigated by Onaolapo, Salami and Oyedokune (2011) and the findings suggested that businesses with a high niche targeting level show high retention potential for consumers and fewer average operational costs for the unit.

Effective niche strategy will in the long run enhance customer loyalty In view of the above, Sohrabi, Khanbooki and Ghazavi (2017) explored the relationship between niche marketing and customer loyalty and their conclusion shows that niche marketing has a dramatically positive influence on client loyalty both directly and indirectly through customer satisfaction. The above was further deduced when Maina (2015); Alao, Egwuonwu and Adeeko (2016) in their studies concluded that niche marketing is an important value differentiation technique aimed at promoting purchasing decisions by buyers.

Methodology

The cross-section survey method was adopted for the research because it explains the current situation by gathering data via a questionnaire. For this study, all the workers (Senior and Middle) in the marketing department in the Head Office of Nestle Nigeria Plc situated at 22/24, Industrial Avenue, Ilupeju, Lagos, consisting of one hundred and twenty-five (125) staff, (45 senior staff and 80 middle staff) at the time of this study were the population of the study. The Stratified random sampling method was used to select participants for the study. A sample size of 95 out of the population of 125 staff was selected so as to obtain a representative sample using YaroYamane formula of sample size determination. A self-constructed questionnaire titled Niche Marketing as a Competitive Marketing Strategy Questionnaire (NMCMSQ) was the instrument used for data collection. The demographic variables of the participants and research questions were presented in frequency score and percentages while the under listed hypotheses were tested using regression correlation.

Research Hypotheses

The following hypotheses were thus formulated and tested in the course of the study to guide the findings of the study.

HO$_1$; Application of niche marketing will not enhance improved organizational performance of `Nestle Nigeria Plc.

HO$_2$; Application of Niche Marketing will not give Competitive edge as regards sustainable growth of Nestle Nigeria Plc.

HO$_3$; Niche marketing does not have significant impact on customers' patronage of Nestle Nigeria Plc products.

Results

Hypothesis One: Application of niche marketing will not assist in organizational performance.

Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.804(a)	.762	.689	.5442

a. Predictor: (Constant): Niche marketing
b. Dependent Variable: Organsational performance

ANOVA

Model	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1 Regression	26.244	1	26.244	28.628	.001ᵃ
Residual	99.756	90	2.078		
Total	126.000	91			

a. Predictors: (Constant): Niche marketing
b. Dependent Variable: Organsational performance

Coefficients

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients		
	B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.
1 (Constant)	2.166	.247		2.122	.000
Niche marketing	1.316	.084	.656	13.504	.001

a. Dependent Variable: Organsational performance

From the regression analysis above, it is to be noted that there is strong correlation **(R= 0.804)** among the two variables and as such H_1 which is the alternative hypothesis should be accepted and H_0 which is the null hypothesis should be rejected. This depicts that application of niche marketing assist organisations in achieving their marketing objectives.. This shows the percentage of total variation of the dependent variable explained by the independent variable. According to the analysis, $R^2 = 0.762$, is high and this implies that the variation in niche marketing are explained by changes in the marketing objectives. Therefore it can be concluded that application of niche marketing assists organisation in achieving their marketing objectives.

With the F value of 28.628 and P value of 0.001 at 0.05 significant level, the regression ANOVA indicates that the regression variables have a significant impact on the response variable. This is also confirmed by R^2 of 0.762 (76.2%). This confirms the validity and reliability of test.

In the light of the statistical results of hypothesis one in which at significant level of 0.05 (r=804 and $p < 0.05$) the R^2 being high and positive transpired that application of nice marketing assists organisation in achieving their marketing objectives. The standard error test gotten for the this hypothesis gave a positive result as the B1/2 gotten is greater than B1 and thus, accepting the alternative hypothesis and so also is the t-test result which shows that the t-calculated for this hypothesis is greater than t-tabulated. Thus, it can be concluded that application of niche marketing assists

organisation in achieving their marketing objectives. This is in line with Parrish, Cassill and Oxenham (2006) who found that niche strategy is a promising global competitive strategy for the textile and apparel industry that can be used to compete with lower priced imports. Chandler (2013), Hop (2015) and Akbar, Omar and Wadood (2015) in their various studies concluded conforming with the above that that niche marketing strategy was one of the effective strategies for gaining market penetration and improved performance in the manufacturing sector.

Hypothesis Two: Application of niche marketing will not serve as form of strategy for marketing to achieve sustainable growth.

In testing this hypothesis, the simple regression with the aid of statistical package for social science (SPSS) computer software was used. The analysis is presented below.

Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.841ᵃ	.788	.738	.3914

a. Predictor: (Constant): Niche marketing
b. Dependent Variable: Sustainable growth

ANOVA

Model	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1 Regression	9.524	1	9.524	44.958	.001ᵃ
Residual	154.556	90	3.220		
Total	164.080	91			

a. Predictors: (Constant): Niche marketing
b. Dependent Variable: Sustainable growth

Co-efficient

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients		
	B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.
1 (Constant)	3.904	0.175		2.552	.000
Niche marketing	1.190	.068	.541	16.117	.001

a. Dependent Variable: Sustainable growth

R = this is said to be the coefficient of correlation of the two variables. From the regression analysis above, it is to be noted that there is strong correlation (0.841= 84.1%) among the two variables and as such H_1 which is the alternative hypothesis

should be accepted and H_0 which is the null hypothesis should be rejected. This depicts that application of niche marketing serves as form of strategy for marketing to achieve sustainable growth. The R^2 = coefficient of determination of the two variables. This shows the percentage of total variation of the dependent variable explained by the independent variable. According to our analysis, R^2 = 0.788 (78.8%), which is high implies that the variation in niche marketing are explained by changes in the sustainable growth. The remaining 21.2% variation is explained by stochastic error term (e) meaning that 21.2% of expected sustainable growth is explained by factors that are not explained in the model.

With the F value of 44.958 and P value of 0.001 at 0.05 significant level, the regression ANOVA indicates that the regression variables have a significant impact on the response variable. This is also confirmed by R^2 of 0.788 (78.8%). This confirms the validity and reliability of test.

The findings for this hypothesis, which at significant level of 0.05 (r=0.841, p < 0.05) the R^2 high and positive led to the conclusion that application of niche marketing serves as form of strategy for marketing to achieve sustainable growth. The standard error test gotten for the this hypothesis also gave positive result as the B1/2 gotten is greater than B1 and thus, accepting the alternative hypothesis and so also is the t-test result which shows that the t-calculated for this hypothesis is greater than the t-tabulated. Hence, it can be concluded that application of niche marketing serves as form of strategy for marketing to achieve sustainable growth. This supports Akbar, Omar, Wadood and Tasmin (2017) who found that niche marketing strategy is one of the most successful strategies applied by different companies around the world and those who are using the strategy are enjoying the success of their organisations.

Hypothesis Three: Niche marketing does not have significant impact on customers' patronage of products of Nestle Nigeria Plc.
In testing this hypothesis, the simple regression with the aid of statistical package for social science (SPSS) computer software was used. The analysis is presented below.
Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.886a	.801	.742	.2336

a. Predictor: (Constant): Niche marketing
b. Dependent Variable: Customers' patronage

ANOVA

Model		Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	13.037	1	13.037	33.155	.001a
	Residual	198.343	90	4.132		
	Total	211.380	91			

a. Predictors: (Constant): Niche marketing
b. Dependent Variable: Customers' patronage

Coefficients

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients		
		B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.
1	(Constant)	2.834	0.463		3.111	.000
	Niche marketing	.423	.025	.248	11.776	.001

a. Dependent Variable: Customers' patronage

R = this is said to be the coefficient of correlation of the two variables. From the regression analysis above, it is to be noted that there is strong correlation (0.886= 88.6%) among the two variables and as such H_1 which is the alternative hypothesis should be accepted and H_0 which is the null hypothesis should be rejected. This depicts that niche marketing has significant impact on customers' patronage of products of Nestle Nigeria Plc. The R^2 = coefficient of determination of the two variables. This shows the percentage of total variation of the dependent variable explained by the independent variable. According to our analysis, $R^2 = 0.801$ (80.1%), which is high implies that the variation in niche marketing are explained by changes in the customers' patronage. The remaining 19.9% variation is explained by stochastic error term (e) meaning that 19.9% of changes in customers' patronage are explained by factors that are not explained in the model.

With the F value of 33.155 and P value of 0.001 at 0.05 significant level, the regression ANOVA indicates that the regression variables have a significant impact on the response variable. This is also confirmed by R^2 of 0.801 (80.1%). This confirms the validity and reliability of test.

In the light of the statistical results of hypothesis three in which at significant level of 0.05 (r=886 and p < 0.05) the R^2 being high and positive transpired that niche marketing has significant impact on customers' patronage of products of Nestle Nigeria Plc. The standard error test gotten for the this hypothesis gave a positive result as the B1/2 gotten is greater than B1 and thus, accepting the alternative hypothesis and so also is the t-test result which shows that the t-calculated for this hypothesis is greater than t-tabulated and this shows that that niche marketing has significant impact on customers' patronage of products of Nestle Nigeria Plc. This is in agreement with Ebitu (2014) who revealed that United Cement Company marketing strategies have significant positive impact on cement consumers' satisfaction in Calabar.

Discussion of Findings
Answer to research question one and the result of the corresponding hypothesis (hypothesis one) tested revealed that application of niche marketing assists organisation in achieving their marketing objectives. This result confirms Akbar, Omar and Wadood (2015); Eniola and Olorunleke (2020) who observed that niche

marketing approach was one of the tactics successfully used in other sectors to achieve market penetration. This is also in line with Salami and Adewoye's (2006) submission that niche marketing can optimize returns for a given marketing cost when handled properly. Dalgic (2013) also noted that niche marketing promotes strong consumer ties and comprehensive knowledge use is becoming a marketing focus. In addition, Ilbery and Kneafsey (2009) concluded that niche marketing is an incentive for small producers (SMEs) and that it is feasible for producers to create reasonably secure networks with final buyers, based on principles of confidence and addressing the research question two, and the outcome of the related hypothesis (hypothesis two) tested showed that niche marketing was applied.

The finding is in agreement with Festus (2010) claim that marketing innovation and creativity are crucial in organizational success. It also concluded that through marketing innovation and creativity such as market segmentation, the insurance industry can improve their businesses and achieve a competitive advantage. Dalgic (2013) also stated that for companies to survive and thrive, they must find a niche market that have: sufficient size to be profitable, no/limited competition, growth potential, sufficient purchasing ability of customers, and unfulfilled needs. Aliyu (2017) also showed niche marketing as a tool for growth and development can improve global education, research and technology for sustainable development and that the growth, profit and survival of any firm irrespective of its policies relies on positively on how well the consumers wants and needs are satisfied by the firm's products or services and this can inversely improve global education, research and technology for sustainable development.

Answer to research question three and the result of the corresponding hypothesis (hypothesis three) tested revealed that niche marketing has significant impact on customers' patronage of products of Nestle Nigeria Plc. This finding supports Onaolapo, Samily and Oyedokun (2011) where they recorded that banks with high market share levels show a high capacity to attract customers and lower average operating unit costs. Sohrabi, Khanbolooki and Ghazavi (2017) also observed that niche marketing has a substantial positive impact on consumer engagement through both overt and indirect customer satisfaction. Kurtz (2012) found that the best commodity in the right place and delivered at the right price using the most effective promotion is the secret to customer loyalty and patronage.

In terms of marketing, Kurtz (2012) showed that the understanding of a successful niche marketing campaign and high customer loyalty can contribute directly to a high level of purchasing intention and re-purchase. As Satit (2012) has argued, matching niche ads to consumer needs would improve customer decision-making over travel agents.

Answer to research question four and the result of the corresponding hypothesis (hypothesis four) tested revealed that niche marketing lead to increase in sales performance of Nestle Nigeria Plc. products. This finding is in line with Alao, Egwuonwu and Adeeko (2016) found that there is a substantial relationship between

niche marketing and organizational sales efficiency. Keramati, Ardala and Ashtiani (2012) have established a link between niche marketing and sales efficiency.

Recommendations

This study authoritatively asserted that niche marketing is a veritable tool for gaining competitive edge in the turbulent market environment where all manufacturing organisations strive hard to serve the same set of customers. This study thus recommended the following;

i.   Organisations must look inwards and incorporate the niche marketing strategy in their corporate marketing strategy to further boost their chances of gaining competitive advantage

ii.   Organisations must assist in customer analysis which will help in ensuring that customer satisfaction is easily ascertained

iii.   Organisations must often embark on product modification so that the organisations products can compete favourably with other products.

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