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Generic strategies: A Driver for Firms Competitiveness in Nigerian Fast Moving Consumers Goods (FMCGs) Sector

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Abstract **- Competitiveness has become one of the objectives of firms in today's world especially in consumer goods sector. Every firm wants to have a reasonable share in the market to achieve specific firm goals which competitiveness is part of. To achieve this objective, consumers goods firms need to adopt appropriate strategies. Thus, the need to see how Porter generic strategies could drive competitiveness strength of Fast Moving Consumer Goods (FMCGs) in Nigeria. The study employed survey research design and primary source of data collection via questionnaire as well as multiple sampling techniques (simple and stratified). Simple regression was utilized as data analytical tool and it was found that differentiation and focus strategies have significant effect on FMCGs firms competitiveness. The study concluded that generic strategies (differentiation and focus) are determinants for firms competitiveness in FMCGs sector. It was therefore recommended that FMCGs firms should continue to deploy differentiation and focus strategies to achieve their competitive objectives.**

Keywords **-** *Generic Strategies, Differentiation strategy, Focus Strategy, Firm Competitiveness, JEL Classification*

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I. Introduction

Today's business activities is changing and the changes have resulted in the redefinition of all activities of a business. The redefinition makes firms in developing economy like Nigeria to find it difficult to accomplish their objectives and goals which competitiveness is part of. Attainment of competitive objective of an organisation is crucial to business continuity and survival. Competitiveness enables organisations in this modern and technology age to continue to be in operation in a turbulent and dynamic external environment of a business. Therefore, it could be observed that competitiveness serves the purpose of viewing how a firm is effectively utilising its resources.

According to Chikan, Czako, Kiss-Dobronyi and Losonci (2022), organisation competitiveness is a construct of analysing the operations of an organisation. It serves as a means for ascertaining the role of functional operations to the success of the organisation. Competitiveness stresses on the strength of an organisation in the market or industry from economic perspective. Competitiveness has become an objective for a firm to achieve. A firm cannot compete in a turbulent external business environment without formulation and employment of appropriate strategies.

Strategy is a significant factor in achieving competitive objective of a firm. Salsabila, Sari, Mardhiyah, and Dinita (2021) mentioned that appropriate strategies could help a firm to outsmart its competitors. Porter postulated a set of strategy that is referred to as generic strategies. These generic strategies have been widely seen as framework of organisational strategy (Akingbade, 2014). The current study focused on the differentiation and focus generic strategies. This is due to the nature of the specific activities of Fast Moving Consumer Goods (FMCGs) in Nigerian environment.

The nature of Nigeria external business environment creates challenges for business organisations. Fast Moving Consumer Goods (FMCGs) firms as business organisations encounter series of challenges that affect their competitive strength in Nigerian economy. According to Farayola and Adeleke (2018), distributing channel and stiff competition, and fierce competitive actions are among the challenges facing FMCGs firm in Nigeria. These have led to decline in the patronage of FMCGs; production not meeting the demand (Adewale, 2022) and making the firms to struggle for customers because the customers react sharply to prices o goods and services. Thus, the need to see or FMCGs firm to adopt differentiation and focus strategies for consumer-net expansion in Nigerian economy.

II. Literature Review

Firm Competitiveness

Competitiveness is a firm' ability to sustainably meet the demand of the customers from time to time (Chikan et al., 2022). Competitiveness could be seen as the degree which a firm is aggressively striving or driving for attainment of its objective, goals and/or success (Diete-Spiff & Nwuche, 2021).

It is the capability of a firm in offering unique quality and quantity of goods and services to the market to outsmart its rivals. According to Chikan (2008), persistence adaptation to social and economic changes enables competitiveness of a firm. Maune (2014) see firm competitiveness as the capacity of a firm to create sustainable competitive advantage that can be useful at organisational level, industrial level and national level. It is used to describe the economic strength of a firm viz-a-viz its rivals. It is referred to as the firm's ability in designing, producing and/or marketing superior valuable product and/or services to the market (Akingbade, 2014). It includes the core processes that aid in achieving firms objectives. These processes include assets (tangible and intangible) combinations. Ngugi (2021) posited that competitiveness could be aided through the deployment of competitive strategies like generic strategies of Porter.

Porter's Generic Strategies

Generic strategies have been known as competitive strategies. Generic strategies are the strategies that gives firms capacity for competition in the market or industry. They are the strategies that enable a firm to attain competitive advantage via cost leadership, product and/or service differentiation and product, service and/or market focus (Salsabila et al 2021; Zanotti, Reyes, & Fernandez, 2018). Mburu (2009) posited that these strategies are market oriented strategies that are well defined which enable value creation in the industry or market which lead to superior performance.. According to Mohammed,Abukari and Iddrisu (2018), generic strategies aid firms to understand and deal with their threats and weaknesses towards achieving competitive advantage.

Porter generic strategies has been identified as cost leadership, differentiation and focus (Ngugi, 202l; Salsabila et al 2021; Ali & Anwar 2021; Islam, Mustafa & Latkovikj 2020; Zanoth et al 2018; Mohammed et al 2018; Brett 2018; Akingbade 2014). These strategies are seen as generic because they are applicable to all nature of businesses, organisations, entrepreneurial activities, industries and sectors. There are three strategies that were postulated by Michael Porter and they are cost leadership, differentiation and focus strategies. However, cost focus and differentiation focus strategies have been added to the strategies. For the purpose of this study, differentiation and focus strategies are selected as generic strategies due to the nature of Fast Moving Consumers Goods (FMCGs).

Differentiation Strategies

Differentiation strategy entail the dissimilarity in the manner at which value on product or service is being created. It encompasses designing and producing matchless products/service. Differentiation strategy is the uniqueness in the product and/or service that a firm offers to the market. The distinctiveness can be on the features of the product or service, brand image, and robust channel network. The aim of differentiation strategy is to distinguish the product of a firm from other firms operating in the same industry or sector. Kinyuira (2014) mentioned that the uniqueness should also translate to profit margin that is higher than the industries average. Differentiation strategy implies that a firm's action plan is directed towards brand image, product and/or value, special feature, exclusive distributive network and use of uncommon modern technology(Abu, 2012). Differentiation could be based on customer specification and/or demand. Akingbade (2020) pointed that differentiation strategy creates relationship between firms and the customers in terms of personalisation of product, functional areas, product mix, channel mix and after sale service. Differentiation strategy focuses on uniqueness in creation of value for products and/or services. Distinguishing a product from other firms' products entails a relatively additions of premium to the cost of production.

Focus Strategy

Focus Strategy is centered on particular niche of the market or customer. Focus strategy can also be referred to as niche strategy. Focus strategy is the strategy that is employed by a firm when aiming to target a particular customers or set of customers in a market. Mohammed et al (2018), the main point of focus strategy is to concentrates on specific customers in a market..It is a strategy for the modification of differentiation and low cost strategies because there could be focus differentiation and cost leadership (Irungu, Kiragu & Ndirangu, 2020). it is the strategy for sub-segmentation of a market segment. Focus strategy is concerned with embracing a narrow competitive scope in an industry.

According to Irungu et al. (2020), differentiation or cost leadership advantage may not be attained when a firm employs focus strategy because focus strategy does not capture the whole market but specific market in the whole market. However, it is possible that the niche (specific) market may have the potentials for the employment of cost leadership and/or differentiation strategies. The scope of focus strategy is smaller and this makes the strategy to be risky when there is a change in the tastes and/or preference of the niche market. The strategy offers the niche market a limited collection of products and/or services and this could reduce the profitability of the firm (Kinyuira, 2014).

Generic Strategies and Firms Competitiveness

Salsabila et al (2021) made a comparison among Fast Moving Consumers Goods (FMCGs) firms in Indonesia and found that generic strategies enable FMCGs firms to experience better financial performance. Generic strategies are the most effective competitive strategies to achieve desirable firm performance (Ali & Anwar 2021; Mohammed et al 2021; Irungu et al., 2020). Omboga and Machoka (2020) examined generic strategies in Kenyan petroleum marketing firms and established a positive association between cost leadership and focus strategy and firm performance. Islam et al (2020); Kinyuira (2014) found generic strategies to have positive influence on performance of firms. Mohammed et al (2018) posited that cost leadership and differentiation strategies are common in banking industries. Similarly, Kavulya, Muturi, Rotich, and Ogollah (2018); Ngaaga and Ragui (2017); Nyaucho and Nyamweya (2015);Valipour, Birjandi and Honarbakhsh (2012) demonstrated that cost leadership and focus strategy has positive and significant effect on firm performance measurements.

Acquaah, Adjei and Mensah-Bonsu (2008) argued that cost leadership and differentiation are positively related to performance in the manufacturing and service sectors in Ghana. Awour (2011) studied competitive strategies, employed by Kenyan Banks, the study concluded that service differentiation and focus strategies were broadly employed. Livvaran (2007) said that porter's typology is a source firm's superior performance and has since provoked many scholars to inquire into it.

It is observed that there are extant studies on generic strategies in across the globe. Most of these literature were not focused on Fast Moving Consumer Goods (FMCGs) in a developing nation like Nigeria. Also, most of the studies reviewed found generic strategies to have positive and significant influence on performance of firms indicators such as competitive advantage, customer satisfaction, financial indicators among others. It is important to see if related or unrelated results will be obtained when generic strategies (differentiation and focus strategies) are being examined in Nigerian Fast Moving Consumer Goods (FMCGs) firms. Therefore, the study hypothesized that:

$H_{01:}$ Differentiation strategy does not have significant effect on firms competitiveness in Fast Moving Consumer Goods (FMCGs).

$H_{02:}$ Focus strategy does not have significant effect on firms competitiveness in Fast Moving Consumer Goods (FMCGs).

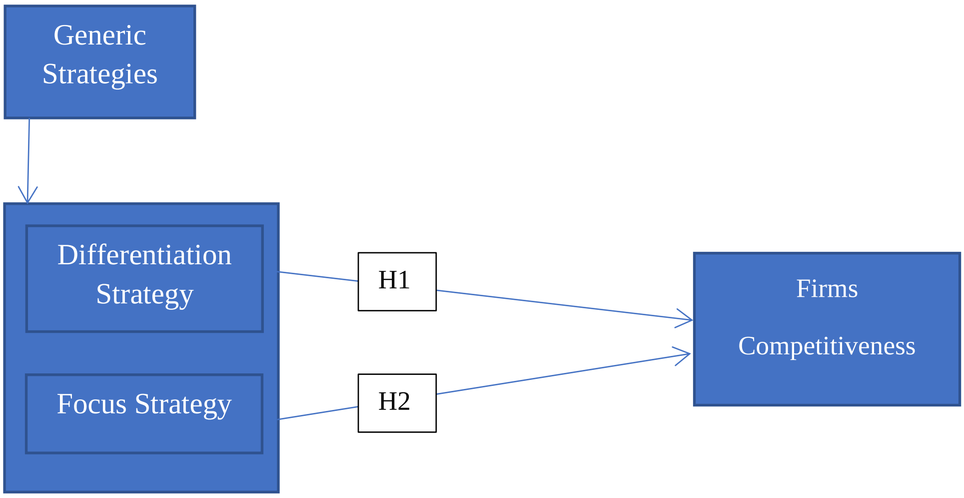
III. Theoretical Underpinning

Innovation Theory

Innovation theory was propounded by Schumpeter Joseph in 1949. Innovation theory believes that a firm must be able to be an agent of creative destruction in the industry or market. Sledzik (2013) mentioned that innovation theory stresses on something unique, something that is uncommon or unusual that is being introduced in the market or an industry. Schumpeter categorised innovation as launching of new products, extension of existing products, application of new method or process, opening new market. Therefore, innovation theory focuses on introduction of new product in a new market or existing market, introduction of existing product in a new market, and adding new values to the features and functions of a new or existing products. According to Okunbanjo (2021), newness is the main word that innovation theory is pin-pointing. The newness could be in a new product, new market or new product in old or new market and/or old product in a new market. Thus, there are elements of the views of innovation theory on generic strategies like differentiation and focus strategies.

Differentiation strategy covers uniqueness in the features and function of a product and focus study encompasses new market. Thus, innovation theory is being employed to underpinned the objectives of the study.

Conceptual Framework



Source: Research Conceptual Framework, 2023

IV. Research Methodology

The study employed survey research design to investigate generic strategies and firm competitiveness in FMCGs sector. The population of the study is the total number of middle level management in the selected Fast Moving Consumer Goods (FMCGs). The middle level management is selected because they are in charge of tactical planning of a firm. The selected firms are Nestle Nigeria Plc, Nigerian Breweries Plc, Honeywell Nigeria Plc, and Unilever Plc. These firms are selected based on the consumer goods that they are producing and they are being listed in Nigerian Stock Exchange for over 3 decades.
The total population of the selected firms are shown in the table below:

Table 1: Population of the Study

S/N	Selected FMCGs Firms	Middle Level Management Staff
1	Nestle Nigeria Plc	433
2	Nigerian Breweries Plc	456
3	Honeywell Nig Plc	382
4	Unilever Nig Plc	235
	TOTAL	1506

Source: Firms' Annual Reports (2020)

The study used Raosoft table to determine the sample size and 307 was arrived at. The study proportionally share the sample size among the selected FMCGs firms

Table 2: Proportionate Sample Size Distribution of the Selected FMCGs Firms

S/N	**Selected FMCGs Firms**	**Population**	**Sample Size**
1	Nestle Nigeria Plc	433	88
2	Nigerian Breweries Plc	456	93
3	Honeywell Nigeria Plc	382	78
4	Unilever Nigeria Plc	235	48
	Total	1506	307

Source: Researcher's Computation (2022)

Thereafter, the study adopted multiple sampling techniques that involve simple random and stratified sampling techniques. Multiple sampling was adopted because it helped the study to group the target population according to the orgaisations selected and it helped to objectively administer questionnaire without biasness. The study used primary data via questionnaire. The items in the questionnaire were adapted from the studies of Abolarinwa, Asogwa, Ezenwakwelu, Court, and Adedoyin, (2020); Wairimu and Kirui (2020); Daniel (2020); Akpoviroro, Amos, and Olalekan (2019); Adimo, (2018); Odunayo, (2018); Maina and Wairimu (2016). The items were ranked using strongly agree, 'agree, undecided, disagree, and strongly disagree. The responses from the respondents were subjected to reliability test using Cronbach Alpa and validity test Kaiser Meyer Olkin (KMO) sampling adequacy. Simple regression analysis was employed a data analytical tool to test the formulated hypotheses to achieve the objectives of the study.

V. Data Analysis

This part of the study revealed the results of the data obtained from the middle level staff of the selected Fast Moving Consumer Goods (FMCGs).

Table 3: Response Rate for the Study

S/N	Selected FMCGs Firms	Questionnaire Administered	Questionnaire Retrieved
1	Nestle Nigeria Plc	88	69 (78.4%)
2	Nigerian Breweries Plc	93	65 (70.0%)
3	Honeywell Nigeria Plc	78	68 (87.2%)
4	Unilever Nigeria Plc	48	34 (70.8%)
	Total	307	236 (76.8%)

Table 3 displayed that 78.4% copies of questionnaire administered in Nestle Nigeria were retrieved; 70% copies of questionnaire administered in Nigerian Breweries Plc were retrieved; 87.2% copies of questionnaire administered in Honeywell Nigeria Plc were retrieved and 70.8% copies of questionnaire administered in Nestle Nigeria were retrieved. Thus, the 76.8% is he overall copies of questionnaire retrieved from the respondents.

Test for Normality

The study conducted normality test for the respondents responses'. Skewness and kurtosis were employed to ascertain if the data are evenly distributed.

Table 4: Normality Test for the Data

Variables	N	Skewness		Kurtosis	
	Statistic	Statistic	Std. Error	Statistic	Std. Error
Differentiation Strategy	236	-0.657	0.132	0.675	0.111
Focus Strategy	236	-0.426	0.132	0.340	0.111
Firm Competitiveness	236	0.218	0.132	-0.593	0.111

Table 4 demonstrated the normality result of the study. It is revealed that differentiation strategy, focus strategy and firm competitiveness had skewness values of -0.657; -0.426; 0.218 respectively. The kurtosis values indicated that differentiation strategy, focus strategy and firm competitiveness had 0.675; 0.340;-0.593 values respectively. This showed that the values of skewness and kurtosis on the variables are within -1 to +1. Therefore, the data is normal to conduct further analysis.

Linearity Test

Linear relationship was conducted using Pearson's correlation coefficient to fulfil the assumption of regression analysis

Table 5: Linearity Test Results

		Test Results	Conclusion
Differentiation Strategy	Pearson Correlation	.583**	Linear Relationship
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.001	
	N	236	
Focus Strategy	Pearson Correlation	.556**	Linear Relationship
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	236	

Table 5 showed the correlation that exist between the independent variable-generic strategies (differentiation and focus strategies) and firm competitiveness in FMCGs. It is revealed that differentiation strategy has correlation value of 0.583 with firm competitiveness and focus strategy has correlation value of 0.556 with firm competitiveness. This means that there is linear relationship between the independent and dependent variables, thus, fulfilling the assumption of regression analysis.

Multicollinearity

In order to avoid multicollinearity, variance inflation factor (VIF)was conducted.

Table 6: Multicollinearity Test Results

Variables	**Tolerance**	**VIF**	**Remark**
Differentiation Strategy	0.539	1.921	No multicollinearity
Focus Strategy	0.554	1.772	No multicollinearity

Table 6 showed that the VIF of differentiation and focus strategies are 1.921 and 1.772 respectively which imply that the values are less than 10. Thus, the independent variables are not correlated and no problem of multicollinearity in the study.

Reliability and Validity Test of Study

Table 7: Reliability and Validity of the Responses

S/N	**Variables**	**Reliability (Cronbach Alpha)**	**Validity (KMO) Test**	**No of Items**
1	Differentiation Strategy	0.853	0.711	6
2	Focus Strategy	0.804	0.683	6
4	Firm Competitiveness	0.802	0.767	6

Table 7 revealed the reliability and validity tests of the respondents' responses. Cronbach Alpha and Kaiser Olkin Measure of sampling adequacy were used to compute the reliability and the validity tests. The reliability and validity test were conducted based on the variables employed to achieve the objectives of the study. The table showed all the variables differentiation strategy, focus strategy and firm competitiveness have reliability values of 0.853; 0.804; and 0.802. respectively.. Also, the validity values via Kaiser Olkin Measure (KMO) showed that 0.711; 0.683; and 0.767 are the values for differentiation strategy, focus strategy and firm competitiveness respectively with 6 items.

Test of Hypotheses

The tables below showed the results of the data collected from the respondents of the study.

Hypothesis one:: Differentiation strategy does not have significant effect on firms competitiveness in Fast Moving Consumer Goods (FMCGs).

Table 8:Regression Result for Differentiation Strategy and Firm Competitiveness

Variables	**R^2**	**Adjusted R^2**	**F-Statistics**	β	**P-value**
Differentiation Strategy	0.534	0.491	21.943	0.635	0.000

Table 8 showed the regression result between differentiation strategy and firm competitiveness. The coefficient of simple linear determination R^2 is 0.534 which implies that 53.4% of the total variations in the firm competitiveness was explained by the differentiation strategy). The remaining 46.6% not explained could be attributed to the stochastic variations. It is revealed that differentiation strategy has a positive and significant effect on the competitiveness of firms in Fast Moving Consumers Goods ($\beta = 0.635$, $F = 21.943$, p-value= 0.000<0.05%). This implies that there is significant effect of differentiation strategy on firm competitiveness. Thus, the null hypothesis is rejected.

Hypothesis two: Focus strategy does not have significant effect on firms competitiveness in Fast Moving Consumer Goods (FMCGs).

Table 9: Regression Result for Focus Strategy and Firm Competitiveness

Variables	**R^2**	**Adjusted R^2**	**F-Statistics**	β	**P-value**
Focus Strategy	0.651	0.403	21.688	0. 959	0.000

Table 9: the coefficient of simple linear determination R^2 of 0.651 which implies that 65.1% of the total variations in the firm competitiveness was explained by focus strategy. The remaining 34.9% not explained could

be attributed to the stochastic variation. The findings revealed that focus strategy has a positive and significant effect on the competitiveness of the firms in Fast Moving Consumers Goods (FMCGs) ($\beta = 0.959$, $F = 21.688$, p-value= $0.000<0.05\%$). This implies that there is significant influence of focus strategy on firm competitiveness. Thus, the null hypothesis is rejected.

VI. Discussion of Findings

Every firm in today's world needs strategies to survive, compete and growth. The study established that generic strategies are important for today's firms to compete in the operating industry or market. The findings revealed that the more a firm employs differentiation strategy, the higher the strength of its competitiveness in the market. It is evidenced a unique distinction in the value, functions and/or features of a product enhances the level at which the firm can fight for a reasonable share in the market or industry. Fast Moving Consumers Goods (FMCGs) firms make their product and service to be unique and different from one another to gain the attraction of the customers which is aiding the competition level in the consumer goods sector. Similarly, the focus strategy has made the FMCGs to attain their competitive objective. The strategy has helped these firms to carved out a new market out of the existing market and supply the needed goods and services of the market. The strategy enable FMCGs firm to identify a niche market thereby supply specific customers the goods they are anticipated for.

The findings of the study are in line with what past studies had reported on generic or competitive strategies across the globe. Similar results with past studies such as Ali and Anwar (2021); Mohammed et al (2021); Irungu, Kiragu,.and Ndirangu, (2020); Islam et al (2020) are found in this study. The findings also related to the findings of Salsabila et al (2021) on generic strategies in Indonesians Fast Moving Consumers Goods (FMCGs).

VII.Conclusion

The study has confirmed that generic strategies have positive and significant effect on competitiveness of FMCGs firms in Nigeria. Thus, the study realised that differentiation strategy and focus strategy are important for firms in consumer goods sector. It is concluded that differentiation and focus strategic as part of Porter's generic strategies are determinant for firms' competitiveness in Nigerian environment that is highly seen as turbulent business environment. In line with this conclusion, the study recommended that FMCGs should continue to make or create distinction features in terms of functionality and physicality so as to continue to compete in the industry or sector. Similarly, FMCGs firms should continue to employ focus strategy by identifying the needs of some consumers in the market. This will continue to strengthen the competitive ability of the firms.

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