

EFFECT OF DIFFERENTIATION STRATEGY ON PERFORMANCE OF WACOT RICE MILLING INDUSTRY, KEBBI STATE

Hussain A. ABUBAKAR,

Department of Business Administration, University of Abuja, Gwagwalada, Nigeria

Abuhussayn75@gmail.com

Abstract

In spite of the use of differentiation strategies the company's performance is seems to be at deviant from the expected result and that motivated the quest for the study. The study determined effect of differentiation strategy on performance of WACOT rice milling industry Kebbi. The research design adopted for the study was case study research design, t population was 120 employees of WACOT rice milling industry, the population of 120 was retained as sample size through census sampling technique. The study found a Significant positive effect of price based differentiation strategy, specialties based differentiation strategy, product based differentiation strategy and customer service quality differentiation strategy on performance of WACOT rice milling industry. The study concluded that there is a significant positive effect of differentintion strategy on performance of WACOT rice milling industry Kebbi is rejected. Specifically, price based differentiation strategy and product bayed differentiation strategy has more contribution to the performance of WACOT rice milling industry Kebbi is rejected as compare with the specialties and customer service based differentiation strategy. The study recommended that: The WACOT rice milling industry Kebbi should invest more into price based differentiation strategy as it has more significant contribution to her performance. The company should also consider product based differentiation strategy as the second valuable strategy after price based differentiation because of its contribution to performance. The company should also improve investment into specialties in order to acquire more market share. The company should also invest in customer service based differentiation strategy as it has a positive contribution to performance.

Keywords: Price, Specialties, Product, Customer Quality, Service, Performance.

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1. Introduction

Competition among firms is getting harder nowadays due to many organizational and environmental reasons such as globalization, population explosion, deregulation, increasing global and domestic competition, and new technoldgies. The concept of differentiation focuses on firms making products that appear different from their competitors with the mind-set of accommodating varying groups or levels of customers. This is in order to make them earn a competitive advantage over others and at the same time serve customers at different levels.

According to Dani (2017), differential advantage is created when a firm's products or services differ from its competitors and are seen as better than a competitor's products by customers. All these strategies come along with the concept of creating efficiency within an industry. Aremu & Lawal (2012), further acknowledges that as a result of globalization, the best indicator of a company's future success is the ability to be different from its peers. This therefore implies that rice companies must adopt differential strategies like change the nature of the product, through varying features such as the use of varying colorations to make it more attractive on the market and packaging in varying sizes to accommodate low income earners. The value added by the uniqueness of the product may allow the firm to charge a premium price for it. Because of the product's unique attributes, if suppliers increase their prices the firm may be able to pass along the costs to its customers who cannot find substitute products easily (Shameem & Gupta, 2012). Demba, Ogal and Muli (2018) successful differentiation has three aspects: command a premium price for its product, increase sales because of additional buyers are won over by the differentiating features and gain buyer loyalty to its brand. A product is differentiated if consumers perceive it to have unique properties, which make it distinct from rival products or services, and ideally unique in some particular way and difficult to emulate.

A differentiation strategy is effectively implemented when the business provides unique or superior value to the customer through product quality, features, or after-sale support and service. Firms following differentiation strategy can charge a higher price for their products based on the product characteristics, the delivery system, the quality of service, or the distribution channels. The quality may be real or perceived, based on fashion, brand name, or image. The differentiation strategy appeals to a sophisticated or knowledgeable consumer interested in a unique quality product or service and willing to pay a higher price for these non-standardized products. Customers value the differentiated products more than they value low costs (Armstrong, 2013).

Organizational performance comprises the actual output or results of an organization as measured against its intended outputs (or goals and objectives). Specialists in many fields are concerned with organizational performance including strategic planners, Operations, finance, legal, and organizational development. Organizational performance encompasses three specific areas of firm outcomes: financial performance (profits, return on assets, return on investment, and so on); product market performance (sales, market share, and so on.); and shareholder return (total shareholder return, economic value added, and so on) (Abiodun, 2014).

It is pertinent to note that rice milling factories across the globe are engaging in differentiation strategy to gain competitive advantage over their competitors and as well improve their performance; this is in line with the studies conducted in different countries. In UK, Anthony (2018) studied the relationship between product differentiation strategies and organizational performance in rice milling factories in Britain and found a significant positive relationship as well as significantly improve the industrial performance. In United States of America, Gabrielson, Seppala and Gabrielson (2016) found hybrid Competitive Strategy and Achieving superior distribution Performance of large ice milling industry while Internationalizing in the High-Technology Market as a good strategy that differentiate an organization among her competitors. In Thailand, Al-Rimawi, Karablie iaHd Al-Kadi (2018) conducted a study on differentiation strategy and performance of rice lling factories in Jordan and found that price differentiation has a significant positive effect on performance of rice milling factories. In Malaysia, Jusoh and Alan (2018) investigated the effect of differentiation Competitive Strategy on Performance of Rice Milling Industry in Keda, Western laysia, they stated that the quality of products produced has given them a competitive advantage and as well improve the performance of rice milling industry in Keda, Western Malaysia.' In ina, Abdullahi and Haim (2018) studied influence of differentiation strategy on performance of Hotels: The moderating role of environmental munificence and found a positive fect on performance of the organization. In Kenya, Kirimo (2015) studied effect of differentiatio Strategies on Performance of Rice Milling Industry in Thika Town, Kenya and discovered 'thqt product differentiation in sizes has a significant positive relationship with the performance rice milling industry. Kedera, Oloko, Sakataka and Oteki (2015) studied effects of product rexatiation strategies on firm product performance: A case of Kenya Seed Company (KSC), Kitale found that there IS a significant positive effect of product differentiation strategy and perfo ante of the industry. In Nigeria, Otu and Aniekan (2013) studied rice market structure, differentiation strategy and performance of rice milling industry in Nigeria: a survey of Akwa Ibom state rice marketers and found a positive contribution of differentiation strategy and performance.

The research study focused on differentiation strategy and performance of rice milling industry in WACOT rice industry Kebbi in order ascertain the effect of differentiation strategy and performance of the industry to seek there is conformity or contradiction from the other related studies as stated in the background.

The rice milling industry in Nigeria has gained high recognition in recent times due to the Federal Government decision concerning the importation of rice into Nigeria where many local producers of rice have gained significantly through market expansion, market share, efficiency and effectiveness, profit making, customer targeting, less competition with foreign firms, incentives from government and so on. From the background, in order to serve customers well and gain competitive advantage, the researcher observed that WACOT rice milling industry has adopted differentiation strategies like price based where her products prices are always given discounts at relative purchased volume, specialties based where her industry tries to uniquely identify demographic areas and site depots) create effective distribution channels, offer products at credit to retail shops and so on. Product based where her products are packaged at varying sizes to accommodate low income earners without tempering with the quality of the products and customer service based where the industry creates an effective communication system for feedback and complaints as well as suggestions for improved methods of serving them. In spite of the above strategies the company's performance seems to be deviant from the expected result as observed from the studies in different countries in the background, the company's profit kept frustrating over the years, the volume of output seems to be reducing, the number of employees seems to remain constant, the company seems not to have an independent subsidiary anywhere in the state or the country, the market share seems to be reduced and so on. Therefore, it is imperative to conduct a study on the effect of differentiation strategy on performance of WACOT rice milling industry in Kebbi" in order to bridge the observed gap.

The main objective of the study is to determine the effect of differentiation strategy on performance of WACOT rice milling industry Kebbi. The specific objectives were:

- i. to determine effect of price based differentiation strategy on performance of WACOT rice milling industry Kebbi.
- ii. to examine effect of specialties based differentiation strategy on performance of WACOT rice milling industry Kebbi.
- iii. to determine effect of product based differentiation strategy on performance of WACOT rice milling industry Kebbi, and.
- iv. to determine effect of customer service quality based on performance of WACOT rice milling industry Kebbi.

The research questions for the study are:

1. to what extent does price based differentiation strategy affect performance of WACOT rice milling industry Kebbi?
2. to what extent does specialties based differentiation strategy affect performance of WACOT rice milling industry Kebbi?
3. to what extent does product based differentiation strategy affect performance of WACOT rice milling industry Kebbi? and.
4. to what extent does customer service quality affect performance of WACOT rice milling industry Kebbi?.

The hypotheses for the study are:

H₀₁ there is no significant effect of price based differentiation rice milling industry Kebbi.

H₀₁: there is no significant effect of specialties based differ WACOT rice milling industry Kebbi.

H₀₁: there is no significant effect of product based differentiatin strategy on performance of WACOT rice milling industry Kebbi, and.

H₀₁: there is no significant effect of customer service quality of WACOT rice milling industry Kebbi.

2. Literature Review

Conceptual Framework

Differentiation Strategies

Differentiation strategy entails the use of unique services or products by a company (Dani, 2017). It involves the capability of a firm to product some product lines or many variations in a line. Differentiation strategies are all-encompassing in market economies and are a prevailing means of getting competitive advantages (Pehrsson, 2016). Demba, Ogal and Muli (2018) averred that differentiation strategy is resourcefully executed when the businesses gives exclusive or better significance to the buyer with the direction of product quality, features, or follow up support.

Hence, business adopting differentiation strategy can allege higher cost for goods or services based on features, allocation system, quality of service, or delivery channels. The value

possibly will be valid or apparent in line with fashion, brand name, or image. Differentiation strategy appeals to complex or well familiar customers that are concerned with uniqueness or quality of product and willing to give priority to benefit rather than cost (Hilman & Kaliappen, 2014).

Dimensions of Differentiation strategy

Literature in strategic management gives several classification of differentiation strategy that explains how firms compete in their relevant market environments (Pehrsson, 2016 & Yulliansyah, et al., 2016) and these are discussed below.

Price Based Differentiation

The strategy of price adjustment is one of the most widely used market competition tactics used by companies. Lowering the price of a product or service with the aim of increasing sales is an example of price based differentiation strategy (Hughes, Hughes, & Morgan, 2010). Furthermore, the alteration (increase or decrease) in the price of a product after analyzing the competitors' products is also a scenario of price adjustment. Jaiyeoba (2013) cautioned that, in the real sense, this marketing strategy should be used very judiciously as overdoing it can lead to adverse results. For instance, increasing your price consistently may make the customers believe that you are a company of high-profit motive while decreasing the price too often would make them to believe that your products are of sustained quality.

Product Based Differentiation

Product packaging, branding, quality, design, etc have become itself a sales tool for most organizations. The consumer's buying behavior is stimulated by the packaging quality, color, wrapper, and other characteristics of packaging. Packaging is a whole package that becomes an ultimate selling proposition, which stimulates impulse buying behavior (Kimotho, 2012). Packaging increases sales and market share and reduces market and promotional costs. According to Pehrsson (2016) package appeals consumer's attentiveness towards a certain brand, increases its image, and stimulates consumer's perceptions about product. This argument suggests that packaging conveys distinctive value to products, works as an instrument for differentiation, helps consumers to choose from a wide range of parallel products, and stimulates customer's buying behavior (Hakkak & Ghodsi, 2015). Kyengo, Ombui and Iravo (2016) stated that most consumers are encouraged to buy a product just by its appeal and do

not necessarily check whether it proves itself or not. Product based definition also means going as far as manufacturing new products for new markets. This approach is usually followed whenever, there is saturation in the current market or when environmental changes such as societal, economic, technological or regulatory make it very hard to generate new sales in those markets.

Specialties Based Differentiation

The specialties based differentiation strategy otherwise known as dynamic capabilities-based differentiation focuses on readjustment of obtainable resources into new proficiency in response to demands from sustained environmental change (Laukkanen et al, 2013). Specialties based differentiation is more precise to certain context such as cultural diverse situation and stress timely responsiveness and reconfiguration of internal and external competence that are congruent with changing business environment (Mills & Morris 2015). This involves the firm's processes that use resources specifically to integrate, reconfigure, gain and release resources to match and even create market change. Specialties based differentiation thus are the organizational and strategic routines by which firms achieve new resource configurations as markets emerge, collide, split, evolve, and die. Protopogrou, Caloghirou and Lioukas (2012) used the term 'combinative capabilities' to describe organizational processes by which firms synthesize and acquire knowledge resources, and generate new applications from those resources. Therefore this study used dynamic capability considering the variables in this study that business can identify their ability to integrate, build, and reconfigure internal and external competences to address rapidly changing situation.

Customer Service Quality Based Differentiation

Customer- service quality refers to the extent of the service provided that meet or exceed the expectations of the customers. Customer service quality based differentiation involves employees' skills and capabilities such as competence, politeness, effective communication and general attitude that serve customer effectively and efficiently and making them feel comfortable with the company (Shameem & Gupta, 2012; Srivastava & Sushil, 2013). Customer service quality based differentiation to perform and complete its differentiation also entails the ability of a company or an organization promised services, quality and accuracy within the given set requirements between the company and the customer. It means that the company provides a service to its customer at a time without making any errors and delivers what it

promised or what it is required to offer within the expected company to help its customers in or agreed upon time. It further suggests the willingness of providing them with a good, quality and fast service. Last y, customer service quality based differentiation ensures that the company cares and gives individualized attention to their customers, to make them feel extra valued and special (Zahra, S. A. & Nielsen, 2015).

Concept of Organizational Performance

Organizational performance is one of the most important variables in the management research and arguably the most important indicator of the organizational performance (Nworu Kalu & Ozioma, 2017). Generally, the concept of organizational performance is based on the idea that an organization is the voluntary association of productive assets, including human, physical, and capital resources, for the purpose of achieving a shared purpose. The concept of organizational performance is very common in the academic literature; its definition is difficult because of its many meanings. For this reason, there is no a universally accepted definition of this concept (Al-Qatawneh, 2014)

Differentiation and Performance

Literature available shows that the relationship between strategy and performance has been examined in numerous works with the linkage between the variables typically operationalized by using various measures and explicit ideas of causality fuelled advancements in strategy research (Pehrsson, 2016; Teeratansirikool et al, 2013). There are number of researches who established that business that select differentiation as competitive strategy produce better performance than rivals (Aminu & Shariff; Teeratansirikool et al, 2013). In an elaborate study that established a significant effect of differentiation strategy on performance, Allen d Helms (2006) postulated that a company that chooses an appropriate generic strategy can achieve reasonable competitive advantage. Manketelove (2014) in his study found that differentiation on service, advertising and personnel affected performance of public universities to greater extent. Differentiation strategy was also found to significantly improve performance in Telecommunication companies in Kenya. Among the differentiation strategies adopted by telecommunication companies included the use of innovation, product, pricing and market (Kyengo et al. 2016).

Furthermore, quality of service or product is perceived to be instrumental in differentiation strategy (Kimando, Njogu & Sakwa, 2012) The positioning of brand making it unique from

that which is being offered by the competitor best describes the differentiation strategy (Hilman & Kaliappen, 2014). Atikiya et al (2015) viewed differentiation strategy as a way of minimizing competition, improving performance and enhancing competitive pressure in the industry. The uniqueness of service or product by a company enables it to alter the price with ease due to value addition (Aremu & Lawal, 2012). Customer loyalty due to product or service brand cushions companies from the threats of five sources in the industry (Armstrong, 2013). Innovation, quality and customer service are considered valuable features which differentiation strategy aims at using in achieving competitive advantage to improve performance (Abiodun, 2014). To realize differentiation strategy buyer prerequisite and behaviors needs to be understood as vital and valuable. Companies can use the size, training of its employees, offering innovative products, reengineering the existing products and embrace modern technology to attain differentiation strategy which will eventually influence performance. A differentiator as a competitive advantage should be on product and/or service whose characteristics differ from that being offered by competitor in the same industry (Asikhia, 2010).

Review of Empirical Studies

Demba, Ogal and Muli (2018) conducted a study on the topic, effect of differentiation strategy on performance by selected car rental business, a case of Nairobi City County, Kenya. The objective of this study was to determine the effects of differentiation strategy on performance of selected car rental business a case of Nairobi City County, Kenya. This study was a cross-sectional descriptive study design where purposive sampling technique was used to select fifteen (15) car rental business in Nairobi City County. Descriptive statistics such as frequency, regression and correlation analysis was used to give result of the study. The findings of the study revealed that differentiation strategy was statistically insignificant at P value greater than 0.05 by chi-Square analysis of variance there by accepting the null hypothesis that differentiation strategy had no effect on performance of car hire business in Nairobi City County. Correlation analysis revealed a negative relationship between indicators for performance improvement and differentiation strategy used at $r = -0.05$. In addition, correlation as a positive relationship between the extent of performance $r = 0.096$. Multiple logistic regression analysis showed that there was no significant ($P > 0.05$) impact of differentiation strategy on performance. In conclusion, by the selected car business in Nairobi City County had no effect; study recommended that the research be carried out using moderating effect of the car hire business on influence of differentiation strategy on performance.

Atikiya, Mukulu, Kihoro and Aiganjo (2015) in a study titled, effect of differentiation strategy on the performance of manufacturing firms in Kenya, sought to establish the effect of differentiation strategy on the performance of manufacturing firms in Kenya. The study was anchored on Porter's competitive business strategyology. The study adopted descriptive and explanatory research design. Pearson's correlation as used to indicate positive correlation between the input and the output variable and regression analysis was used to test the relationship between the constructs.

The study confirms previous studies on positive relationship between differentiation strategy and firm performance. The study adds new knowledge to the literature on strategies adopted by manufacturing firms in a developing country context. The study concludes that manufacturing firms interested in enhancing their performance and staying ahead of competition should pursue differentiation strategy.

Mbithi, Mutur and Rambo (2015) examined the effect of market development strategy on performance in Sugar Industry in Kenya. This study investigates the performance implications of using majorly two market strategy approaches; developing new market segments and extending geographically. Specifically, the study uses a model in which market development strategy indicators are regressed on performance measure. The relationship between marketing development strategy and firm performance and give mixed outcomes with developing new market segments being found to have influence on sales volume and total turnover though not statistically significant while extensions into new geographical areas having influence in sales volume with statistically significant results. Based on the outcome both extending to new regions and developing new market segments does not result to increased profitability but increased market share which would eventually positively affect profitability. Rebranding, promotions, different quantity packaging enables accessing new segments of the market while opening outlets or agencies could boost extending geographically for sugar companies. This study contributes significantly to the current marketing strategy literature by examining how the two aspects of marketing strategies relates different performance measures in the context of sugar industry.

Theoretical Framework

Resource Based Theory

This study is anchored on the resource based theory formerly presented by Wernerfelt in 1984. The theory assessed the firm using resource-market matrix instead of the market share-growth combination of the competitive position view presented by the Boston Consulting Group in 1972. In the place of emphasizing market entry barriers as a way of gaining a competitive advantage to increase returns, the resource-based theory stressed source position barriers' as a means of - increasing profits. A resource based theory is one of the most widely accepted theories of strategic management (Teece, 2014). In terms of performance resource may increase the firm's capacity to charge high prices and thus contribute to performance by helping the firm to appropriate value linked to competitive advantage. Furthermore resources may be used to erect entry barriers and so increase performance at the industry level (Yuliansah, Ra al & Rose, 2016).

3. Research Methodology

The study adopted a case study research design because of its ability to study a focused population involved in the study through a holistic approach with the use of questionnaire. The research population for the study was 2,330 employees of while 1,100 was used as sample size through random sampling technique. Primary data was used for the study, 5-points Likert's scale type questionnaire was used for data collection. The validity of the instrument was done through test approach at WACOT rice milling company Kebbi state with a with a consistent result of 93 to 98 percent. The researcher used descriptive statistics for data presentation and multiple regression analysis for the test of hypotheses. Thus model specification implicit function, Organizational Performance = (price based differentiation strategy, specialties based differentiation strategy, product based differentiation strategy, customer service quality differentiation strategy). Explicitly; $OP = f(PDS, SDS, TDS, CDS)$, therefore, $OP = \beta_1 PDS + \beta_2 SDS + \beta_3 TDS + \beta_4 CDS + e$ Where: Op = Organizational Performance, PDS = price based differentiation strategy, SDS specialties based differentiation strategy, TDS = product based differentiation strategy, CDS = customer service quality differentiation strategy, Intercept, $\beta_1, \beta_2, \beta_3, \beta_4$ - Regression coefficient, e = Error Term. Apriori Expectation: $\beta_1 > 0; \beta_2 > 0, \beta_3 > 0, \beta_4 > 0$. The researcher made use of nominal and ordinal scales. The calculation was done through SPSS version 21.

4. Results and Discussion

The data was collected from 10 respondents which represent 100% which form part of data analyses. The study shows that all the respondents were literate enough to answer the questionnaire adequately and their years of work experience was reasonable to know about the practices in the company. Test hypotheses:

Table 1: Model Summary^b

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.924 ^a	.922	.922	.30013

- a. Predictors: (Constant), price based score, Specialties score, product Based score, Customer Service based Score
- b. Dependent Variable: Organizational Performance

Source: SPSS Output, 2019

The model in the Table above tells us how much of the variance in the dependent variable (organizational performance) is explained by the model (which includes the variables of PDS, SDS, TDS and CDS).

Table 2: Regression Coefficient Summary of the Four Dimensions of Differentiation Strategies Coefficients^a

Mode	Standardized Coefficients		Unstandardized Coefficients	t	Sig
	B	Std Error	Beta		
(Constant)	-2.031	.172		-11.229	.000
Price Based score	.782	.028	.754	31.754	.000
1 Specialties Based score	.342	.027	.342	10.114	.000
Product Based score	.687	.028	.659	11.938	.000
Customer Service Based Scores	.582	.029	.551	12.664	.000

- a. Dependent Variable: Organizational Performance

Source: SPSS Output, 2019

H₁. There is no significant effect of price based differentiation strategy on performance of WACOT rice milling industry Kebbi.

The table above shows that price based differentiation strategy made significant positive prediction to organizational performance ($P=0.75$, $t=31.754$, $p<0.0005$). This implies that there is a proportionate relationship between a price based differentiation strategy and performance of WACOT rice milling industry Kebbi. This informs the rejection of the null hypothesis which states that there is no significant effect of price based differentiation strategy on performance of WACOT rice milling industry Kebbi.

H0₂: there is no significant effect of specialties on performance of WACOT rice milling industry Kebbi.

Similarly, regression coefficient summary in the table above shows that, specialties based differentiation strategy has significant positive effect on performance of WACOT rice milling industry Kebbi ($t=10.114$, $p<0.0005$). The study, therefore, rejected the null hypothesis which states that specialties has no significant effect on performance of WACOT rice milling industry Kebbi.

H0₃: There is no significant effect of product based differentiation strategy on performance of WACOT rice milling industry Kebbi.

The table above shows a significant positive effect of product based differentiation strategy on performance of WACOT rice milling industry Kebbi ($P=0.65$, $t=11.938$, $p<0.0005$). This implies that product based differentiation strategy has a significant positive effect on performance of WACOT rice milling industry Kebbi. Therefore, the null hypothesis which states that there is no significant effect of product based differentiation strategy on performance of WACOT rice milling industry Kebbi is rejected.

H0₄: There is no significant effect of customer service based differentiation strategy on performance of WACOT rice milling industry Kebbi. This implies that customer service based differentiation strategy has a significant positive effect on performance of WACOT rice milling industry Kebbi. Therefore, the null hypothesis which states that there is no significant effect of customer service based differentiation strategy on performance of WACOT rice milling industry Kebbi is rejected.

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

The study concluded that there is a significant positive effect of differentiation strategy on Specifically, price based performance of WACOT rice milling industry Kebbi differentiation strategy and product based differentiation strategy has more contribution to the performance of WACOT rice milling industry Kebbi is rejected as compared with the specialties and customer service based differentiation strategy.

The study recommended that:

- i. The WACOT rice milling industry Kebbi should invest more into price based differentiation strategy as it has more significant contribution to her performance.
- ii. The company should also consider product based differentiation strategy as the second valuable strategy after price based differentiation because of its contribution to performance.
- iii. The company should also improve investment into specialties in order to acquire more market share.
- iv. The company should also invest in customer service based differentiation strategy as it has a positive contribution to performance.

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