



MARKETING STRATEGY AND COMPETITIVE EDGE OF HOSPITALITY FIRMS IN PORT HARCOURT

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Article history:	Abstract:
<p>Received: November 20th 2021 Accepted: December 20th 2021 Published: January 30th 2022</p>	<p>The study investigated the relationship between marketing strategy and competitive edge of hospitality firms in Port Harcourt. Two objectives and hypotheses were formulated to direct the study. The quantitative study obtained primary data with a well structured research instrument. A total of 125 sample population were obtained from the register of hospitality firms in Port Harcourt. The descriptive statistics showed that the mean and standard deviation of innovation and promotion strategies were instrumental to competitive edge of hospitality firms. Spearman's rank correlation coefficient output inferred that there is positive and significant relationship between innovation strategy and competitive edge and between promotion strategy and competitive edge of hospitality firms in Port Harcourt. The study concluded that adopting innovative and promotional strategies will engender competitive advantage by hospitality firms. It is recommended that hospitality firms should integrate innovation strategy in their organizational policy so as to gain competitive edge; that pro-activeness in service delivery should be the livewire of hospitality employees so that competitive edge can be ascertained, lastly, promotion strategy as a tool for competitive edge should be adopted by hospitality firms.</p>

Keywords: Marketing strategy, Competitive edge, Hospitality firm, Innovation, Promotion, Strategy Marketing.

INTRODUCTION

The incessant developments in the marketing domain of 21st century hospitality firms are dynamics as a result of technology, innovation, promotion, pricing and product packaging which guarantees competitive edge. The need to aggressively key into marketing strategy becomes the only solution for competitive advantage and sustainability of the hospitality firms. Marketing strategy is a process that allows a hospitality firm to concentrate its limited resources on the slightest availability of opportunities to increase revenue and achieve a sustainable competitive edge (Baker, 2008). Strategic planning approach entails a holistic overview of the company's planning efforts directed towards formulating, evaluating and selecting of market-oriented competitive strategy that will position the hospitality firm ahead of other competitors (Homburg, Kuester, & Krohmer, 2009). Marketing strategy leverages the combination of resources and

capabilities within a hospitality firm to achieve a competitive advantage and thus enhances firm performance (Cacciolatti & Lee, 2016).

Hospitality business is perceived as the commercial venture which offer guest accommodation, food and drink when out of their station for specific assignment (George, 2001). Rundell (2007) defined hospitality as a friendly, homely and conducive environment that is expected to house the guest with a warmly welcome and care.

For hospitality firms to achieve competitive edge, the need to integrate innovation and promotion strategies as the key elements that will enhance marketing strategy becomes imperative. Innovation strategy evolved into service packaging, product packaging, pricing packaging and customer relationship packages. However, the promotion strategy aspect includes personal selling, digital advert, social-media and billboard placement.



Competitive advantage is the attribute that allows an organization to outperform its competitors. Those attributes are found in service-product innovation and promotion strategy. Competitive advantage is the leverage a hospitality firm has over its competitors. This can be gained by offering clients better and greater services. Advertising products or services with lower prices or higher quality piques the interest of consumers. Target markets recognize these unique products or services. This is the reason behind brand loyalty, customer retention or why customers prefer one hospitality firm over another (Clulow, Gerstman, & Barry, 2003).

The service nature of hospitality firms often require innovation to cope with the changing marketing environment, but building strong marketing strategy requires the presence of strong decision-making processes and organizational support mechanisms (Dibrell, Davis, & Craig, 2008) that affect the perceptions of opportunities in their hospitality firms. Currently, advances in technology are arguably the most potent drivers of change within the global travel industry. Innovation is one of the key ways by which organizations adapt to and manage competition. However, firms in the same industry segment do not always react similarly to the environmental changes in the same manner. Hence, marketing strategy as a strategic choice drives the way the firms acquire, allocate and utilize resources to create dynamic capabilities in fast changing environments (Zhou & Li, 2009).

In the presence of stiff competitiveness in hospitality firms, the need for marketing strategy to gain an edge over other competitors in the business is very crucial to positive organizational performance. Then, hospitality firms is the engine room for globalization, modernization and international trade today.

Competitiveness ensure dynamic alterations in the activities of operation so as to raise the quality of service to international standard as well help to achieve appropriate marketing edge (Adesina, 2003). Many good ideas on how services should be offered and be serviced have suddenly become obsolete in the face of ever changing environment. In the same vein, many hospitality firms find it difficult to cope with changing customer needs, tests, expectations, etc as a result of innovation, many firms have fold-up or window down.

In Nigeria, many hospitality firms have packed up, staggered, collapsed, and relocated as a result of unfavourable competition. It is based on the foregoing that this study was designed to determine the relationship between marketing strategy and

competitive edge of hospitality firms in Port Harcourt. The specific objectives are:

- (i) To determine the correlation between innovation strategy and competitive edge of hospitality firms in Port Harcourt.
- (ii) To investigate the relationship involving promotion strategy and competitive edge of hospitality firms in Port Harcourt.

HYPOTHESES

- (i) There is no positive and significant relationship between innovation strategy and competitive edge of hospitality firms in Port Harcourt.
- (ii) There is no positive and significant relationship between promotion strategy and competitive edge of hospitality firms in Port Harcourt.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Conceptual Framework Marketing Strategy

The word 'strategy' is a plan geared toward achieving a specific goal. In marketing, it is widely used to describe a seemingly endless number of marketing activities. Today, every activity in marketing is perceived as strategy. There are product strategy, strategic pricing, strategic promotion, strategic distribution and strategic market penetration. Wright and Pringle (1992) define strategy as top management's plans to attain outcomes consistent with the organization's missions and goals.

Marketing strategy is a deeply customer-oriented concept focusing on the top management's long-term vision for competitive advantage through product innovation, other functions being fully subservient to this process (Vassinen, 2006). Thompson (1995) defined strategic marketing precisely as: "A unified, comprehensive and integrated marketing plan designed to ensure that the basic objective of the enterprise are achieved". The three adjectives that Thompson used to define a plan made the definition quite adequate. 'Unified' means that the plan joins all the parts of an enterprise together; 'comprehensive' means it covers all the major aspects of the enterprise, and 'integrated' means that all parts of the marketing plans are compatible with each other for effective performance. Through the use of marketing strategy an organization can concentrate its limited resources in the best manner possible so as to increase the profits and be at an advantage as compared to the other organizations. The main goal behind every marketing strategy should be customer satisfaction.

Innovative Strategy: According to Porter (1996), strategy is the presence of a set of activities that will



allow the hospitality firm to differentiate itself from its competitors and maintain its competitive position. Typically, research have shown that companies that have an innovation strategy are more successful than those that do not have innovation strategy (O'Regan, Ghobadian, & Gallea, 2005). Innovation strategy is a guide that makes hospitality firms think about why they innovate before attempting to innovate. The Innovation strategy consists of economic goals and development areas related to the production of new goods and services. They are the overall criteria that provide a set of filters through which the concepts of strategic roles and a new product or service must pass, thus determining the strategic mission of new service approach. According to Lendel and Varmus (2011), innovation strategy determines how strategies shape the approach to goals, methods and ways to enhance and improve company's innovative capabilities.

According to Neneh and van Zyl (2017), innovativeness entails the introduction of new ideas that allows a firm to improve its product or service in order to outsmart rivals. Indeed Roth and Fishbin (2014) observed that hotels across the globe uses the idea of strategic management theory as well as best practices based on industry-specific experience with trends focusing on innovation. Regardless of the source of innovativeness, the goal is to improve operations, guest service and revenue that translate into competitive advantage.

The Innovation strategy allows top management to monitor the activities of its competitors, access customer market information, make effective use of company resources, and make cost-effective investments in research and development (Oke, Walumbwa, & Myers, 2012). These activities have been found to positively affect the company's innovation performance (Verhees & Meulenber, 2004).

Hospitality firms are constantly conducting their activities under internal and external contingencies. In terms of emergency, for managing uncertainties, organizations can try to improve their performance by implementing effective strategies (Donaldson, 2001). For example, in the face of an increasingly competitive environment and ever-changing customer needs, managers will design a marketing strategy and allocate resources appropriately to improve the company's performance. In other words, implementing a marketing strategy in a business can ensure the implementation of successful innovations by reducing critical internal and external contingencies.

According to Tang (1998), there are three important questions that need to be answered on the innovation

strategy: (i) what kind of innovations the hospitality firm needed? (ii) how will the hospitality firm implement these innovations? (iii) By what methods will the hospitality firm present the innovations in the market? Answers to these questions require regulations that are consistent with the strategy for all of the hospitality firms' resources, business relationships, and service processes. Generally, it was viewed in the literature that the innovation strategy has a positive effect on the competitive advantage (Wu & Lin, 2011).

Promotion Strategy: Promotion is one of the major forms of drawing attention of prospective guests, which include advertising (digital and traditional), personal selling, sales promotion, and public relations (Kotler, 1996). These are therefore referred to as the promotional mix. Most scholars have used different words at different times to connote promotion. Kotler (1991) use the term "communication mix" rather than promotional mix.

Promotion strategy have the ability to enhance competitive edge of hospitality firms. From the perspective of digital promotion, the effectiveness of marketing strategy lies on digital media being an interactive mechanism for advertising through the internet, mobile phones, and social networks. The shift from traditional advertising system is fading away gradually. Many studies have indicated that digital advertising works in conjunction with TV, print, and other traditional media to generate the greater increase in marketing effectiveness (Koetsier, 2014).

Competitive edge

Competitiveness of a firm behooves on its capacity to achieve targets. A firm has competitive advantage when it is able to create more economic value than its rivals. Competitive edge is made up of those factors that a firm needs to have in order to succeed in business (Barney & Hesterly, 2010; Analoui, & Karami, 2003). There are three types of competitive edge; the cost of leadership, differentiation and focus (Porter, 1985). However, strategic options represents an area that every hospitability firm can explore and as well choose in order to compete in the marketplace and gain sustainable competitive advantage. Consequently, some strategic management researchers are advocating the importance of competitive advantage or the understanding of firms' market positions from a dynamic theoretical perspective (Lei et al., 1996; Porter, 1991).



Competitive edge is important for hospitality organizations because it is only hospitality firms with superior performance skills that are equipped with core competencies necessary for quality service delivery that will achieve competitive advantage in the marketplace. Other firms need to acquire same or superior competencies in order to withstand the competition. Not all hospitality firms have a competitive edge and so it is important for the firm to find a way of obtaining, maintaining and increasing their competitive edge in order to outsmart their rivals.

Hospitality Firm

The word hospitality firm was originated from the Latin word *HOSPE*, meaning "host or guest and hospitium", which means guest chamber, inn or quarter (Chon & Sparrow, 2000). Hospitality firm is perceived as the business entity that offer guests accommodation, foods and drinks during transit (George, 2001). Rundell (2007) defined hospitality as friendly and generous behavior towards visitors or guests that makes them feel welcomed and at home by making available foods, drinks, apartment and entertainment to them.

The services of hospitality firm ranging from guest inn, foods, beverage, drinks, banqueting rooms, conference facilities, recreational facilities, health and wellness facilities. Others are executive lounge, express check-in and checkout services, as well as travel desk, business centre and parking facilities etc.

THEORETICAL REVIEW

Social Capital Theory: The study marketing strategy and competitive edge of hospitality firms anchors on social capital theory which focuses on opportunity connectedness of hospitality firms in competitive advantage model. The theory was based on the premise that network of social relations characterized by trust, reciprocity and cohesiveness are necessary in facilitating cooperation and competitive advantage of hospitality firms (Jackman & Miller, 1998; Coleman, 1988). Most entrepreneurs connect themselves with certain networks to gain competitiveness by obtaining relevant information, skills and other resources needed for their business successes. Considering the current study, it can be said that when hospitality firms will link very well with their customers and suppliers if innovation and promotion strategies are appropriated (Nordman & Tolstoy, 2016; Hanelletal, 2014; Tolstoy & Agndal, 2010). Adding to that, the interface between firms and the environment is important in promoting competitiveness. This is consistent with Bettcher

and Mihaylova (2015) and Chris and Graham (2007) who pointed out that social connection are vital for stimulating entrepreneurial competitiveness. Also, opportunity connectedness will help strengthen hospitality firms' chances of competitive leadership in the business arena. This enables them to be exposed to innovative practices while at same time ensuring all-member commitment to changing processes that will see through novel actions and competitive advantage. In sum, it is obvious that a firm that is well linked with customers, government and suppliers gains important advantage and benefits of achieving its goals successfully. Arising from this understanding, it is evident that social connections unlock the chances of firms in attaining business goal.

Empirical Review

Wanjohi, (2016) examined the marketing strategies and competitive advantage in the hospitality industry: A study of Hotels in Thika, Kenya. He found out that marketing strategies individually had a positive influence on the competitive advantage of hotels in Thika. Krisnawati, Sule, Febrian, and Hassan, (2016) understudied the competitive strategy and its impact on hotel performance: a partial least square approach on hotel managers in Bali, Indonesia. Their results advised that in conducting its businesses, the competitive strategy impact the performance of chain hotels in Bali.

Kariuki, (2012) did a study on service strategies and competitive advantage of five star hotels in Nairobi, Kenya. Their results showed that service provider efforts was geared towards winning over competitors, improve service quality, compete effectively, employees behaviour, management roles in the achievement of a competitive advantage among other competitors. Oscar, Rubén, and Ramírez, (2014) carried out a study on marketing strategies for hotel industry internationalization in Morelia. Their findings revealed that marketing strategies have significant impact on internationalization of hotel industry in Morelia.

METHODOLOGY

The study is quantitative in nature establishing the relationship among the variables studied. This is a cross sectional survey study aimed at establishing the relationship between marketing strategies and competitive edge of hospitality firms in Port Harcourt. The selection of the hospitality firms in Port Harcourt was justified by the fact that these firms are assumed to have attained meaningful service levels in the



industry. This study adopted questionnaire as source of data collection. The major hospitality firms in Port Harcourt were selected among multitude of them.

They are Hotel Presidential, Vissa Carina Ltd, Dotnova Hotels, City View Hotel and Helana Haven Hotel.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table 1: Data presentation

S/No	Hospitality Firms	No. of instrument
1	Hotel Presidential	25
2	Vissa Carina Ltd	25
3	Dotnova Hotels	25
4	City View Hotel	25
5	Helana Haven	25
	Total	125

The well-structured questionnaires were administered to employee of hospitality firms in Port Harcourt, thereafter, the researcher waited patiently to retrieve the instrument. The employee attended to the research instrument appropriately.

Research question 1: Does innovation strategy relates with competitive edge of hospitality firms in Port Harcourt?

Table 2: Statistics of innovation strategy and competitive edge

		Improvement marketing planning	Creative ideas	Imaginative concepts	Standardized customer relationship
N	Valid	125	125	125	125
	Missing	0	0	0	0
	Mean	1.85	1.78	1.71	1.88
	Std. Deviation	.907	.938	.932	.938

Table 2 expressed the result of research question one; revealing the mean and standard deviation of improvement marketing planning $x = 1.85$ and std 0.907 ; creative ideas $x = 1.78$ and std $= 0.938$; imaginative concepts $x = 1.71$ and std $= 0.932$ and standardized customer relationship $x = 1.88$ and std $= 0.938$. The statistical output showed that service quality dimension "innovation strategy" is a tool that influences competitive edge of hospitality firms in Port Harcourt.

Research question 2: Does promotion strategy associate with competitive edge of hospitality firms in Port Harcourt?

Table 3: Statistics of promotion strategy and competitive edge

		Personal selling	Digital advert	Social media advert	Billboard advert
N	Valid	125	125	125	125
	Missing	0	0	0	0
	Mean	1.85	1.86	1.90	1.99
	Std. Deviation	.959	1.014	.966	1.036

Table 3 instituted the statistics of research question two indicating the mean and standard deviation of various respondents: personal selling $x = 1.85$ and std $= 0.959$; digital advert $x = 1.86$ and std 1.014 ; social media advert $x = 1.90$ and std $= 0.966$ and billboard advert $x = 1.99$ and std $= 1.036$. The statistical output showed that service quality dimension "promotion strategy" is a factor that enhances competitive edge of hospitality firms in Port Harcourt.



Testing of hypotheses

Hypothesis 1: There is no positive and significant relationship between innovation strategy and competitive edge

Table 4: Innovation strategy and competitive edge

		Innovation strategy	Competitive edge
Spearman's rho	Innovation strategy	Correlation Coefficient	1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000
		N	125
	Competition edge	Correlation Coefficient	.959**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000
		N	125

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Table 4 contained the output of hypothesis one using spearman's rank correlation coefficient to determine the relationship between innovation strategy and competitive edge. The rho= 0.959 while the pv=.000 which is less than 0.05 level of significance. Based

on the decision rule, it implies that there is positive and significant relationship between innovation strategy and competitive edge of hospitality firms in Port Harcourt.

Hypothesis 2: There is no positive and significant relationship promotion strategy and competitive edge

Table 5: Promotion strategy and competitive edge

		Promotion strategy	Competitive edge
Spearman's rho	Promotion strategy	Correlation Coefficient	1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000
		N	125
	Competitive edge	Correlation Coefficient	.963**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000
		N	125

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Table 5 contained the output of hypothesis two using spearman's rank correlation coefficient to determine the relationship between innovation strategy and competitive edge. The rho= 0.963 while the pv=.000 which is less than the 0.05 level of significance. Based on the decision rule, it implies that there is positive and significant relationship between promotion strategy and competitive edge of hospitality firms in Port Harcourt.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

Marketing strategy has been a construct used in the marketing domain to improve the quality of services and products of hospitality firms. The findings revealed that innovation and promotion strategies are elements that enhanced competitive edge of hospitality firms in Port Harcourt. The result of this study has direct bearing with the findings of the following scholars: Wanjohi, (2016); Krisnawati, Sule, Febrian, & Hassan, (2016); Kariuki, (2012) and Oscar, Rubén, & Ramírez, (2014).

CONCLUSION

Marketing strategy is a marketing plan designed to facilitate the actualization of the basic objective of the enterprise with cost optimization. Therefore, the hospitality firms adopts marketing strategy to gain competitive edge using appropriate approaches of innovation strategy which includes improvement of marketing planning; creative ideas; imaginative concepts and standardized customer relationship. However, promotion strategy plays a significant role in competitive edge too. The study concludes that adopting innovative and promotional strategies will engender competitive advantage by hospitality firms. They are therefore expected to adopt personal selling, digital advert, social media advert and discount sales as approaches to dominate the market.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The recommendations were drawn from the findings of this study:

- (i) that hospitality firms should integrate innovation strategy in organizational policy so as to gain competitive edge.



- (ii) that pro-activeness in service delivery should be the livewire of hospitality employee so that competitive edge can be ascertained.
- (iii) that promotion strategy as a tool for competitive edge should be adopted by hospitality firms.

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APPENDIX

A. Research instrument

S/N	Statements	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
	Research question 1: What is the relationship between innovation strategy and competitive edge				
1	Improvement of marketing planning.				
2	Creative ideas.				
3	Imaginative concepts.				
4	Standardized customer relationship.				
	Research question 2: What is the relationship between promotion strategy and competitive edge				
1	Impact of personal selling				
2	Effect of digital promotion				
3	Implication of social media				
4	Discount approach to sales				

b. Data Collection

Innovation strategy and competitive edge

S/N	Statements	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1	Improvement of marketing planning.	55	41	22	7
2	Creative ideas.	61	40	14	10
3	Imaginative concepts.	68	34	14	9
4	Standardized customer relationship.	52	47	15	11

Promotion strategy and competitive edge

S/N	Statements	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1	Impact of personal selling	57	41	16	11
2	Effect of digital promotion	61	34	17	13
3	Implication of social media	55	38	22	10
4	Discount approach to sales	51	40	18	16