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EFFECT OF COMPETITIVE STRATEGIES ON GROWTH OF SMALL AND MEDIUM ENTERPRISES IN EAST-NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

The ever changing and turbulent competitive business environment pose major challenges to large auditing firms like any other organization in Nigeria and manager shave been struggling to compete favorably. The specific objectives of the study are to establish the effects product penetration strategy, product development strategy and market development strategy on the SMEs growth in north east, Nigeria.The study adopted a quantitative research with the specific research design being a cross sectional survey design. The population of the study was classified

Introduction

SMEs are focal as the backbone of the economy of Nigeria not because it constitutes about 87 percent of all enterprises, but because, it contributes to about 61 percent of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) (Effiom & Edet, 2018). In spite of this, it is critical for SMEs in Nigeria to effectively maintain a steady growth and survival due to persistent organisational and environmental challenges like lack of penetration strategy, development strategy, lack of basic business knowledge, skills and attitude; high operating costs, poor attitude to marketing activities, government policy, and above all, lack of product development strategy. Similarly, the current trend of the global business environment has led to tight competition for SMEs and this has become unavoidable for them, despite their operations and sizes (Aroyeun et al., 2019).

Studies conducted within the last decade revealed that the sustainability of SMEs in both developed and developing nations like Nigeria could be traced to the effective implementation of entrepreneurial orientation (Brownhilder & Johan, 2017).

Competitive strategy applies when a firm exploits new or unique markets good for strong low cost competitor, segment markets and offer differentiated products and services to the new market segment offer unique features products, focused relationship building. A firm's relative position within its industry determines whether a firm's profitability is above or below the industry average. Generic strategies are concerned there are three approached which come under these strategies since they can be applied on products or services and it also can be available for all size of companies (Porter,

into five states in the north east Nigeria. The sampling frame was 180 SMEs arising five states of which a sample size of 123 SMEs were extensively surveyed to ascertain the impact of competitive advantage on growth of SMEs. The sampling technique used was stratified random sampling. Primary data was collected by use of questionnaires which were administered through drop and pick method. Data screening was done to identify any missing data and it was further tested for reliability and normality. Reliability was tested using Cronbach's Alpha. Normality was tested using Kurtosis, Skewness and Kolmogorrov Smirnov (K-S) test. Outliers in the data were identified by use of a Stem and Leaf graph. Multicolinearity was also tested and all study variables were found to be free from any multicolinearity. Data was analyzed using SPSS version 24. Descriptive statistics e.g standard deviations and T-tests were used for preliminary tests. Inferential statistics such as Pearson's correlation, ANOVA and multiple regression analysis were used for further analysis. The key findings were that competitive advantage had a positive influence on the growth of SMEs in north east Nigeria.. The study recommends managerial and policy adjustments in line with strategic management practices to enhance competitiveness of SMEs in the north east, Nigeria.

***KEYWORDS:**, Competitive strategy, product development, SMEs*

1998). Porter (1998) suggested three generic competitive strategies for protecting new markets or strategic business units. Porter's typology of generic competitive strategies is: cost leadership, differentiation, and focus. These three actually fall into two basic categories. The focus strategy calls for concentration on a niche or a narrow segment. But Porter says that success in this strategy can be achieved either via cost leadership or differentiation (Porter, 2012).

Porter named these strategies as cost leader ship which can also be known as no frill strategy, differentiation where the company will have to create a unique or desirable products and services and focus where companies offers a specialised service in a specific niche market. Focus strategy can subdivide into further two parts as cost focus and differentiation focus (Porter, 2012). The main motive of Porter's generic strategies is to gain competitive advantage which means the company will focus on developing an edge that helps the company in getting the maximum sales of their product or service and also help in take it away from the competitors. This can be done through two strategies. First one is increasing the profits by reducing the costs and also charging prices which are on the basis of average in the industry. Second method is increasing the market share through charging lower prices and increasing the sales (Porter & Lee, 2013).

Competitive strategy applies when a firm exploits new or unique markets good for strong low cost competitor, segment markets and offer differentiated products and services to the new market segment offer unique features products, focused relationship building (Porter, 1998). Thompson and Strickland (2010) on their part, define competitive strategies as consisting of all those moves and approaches that a firm has and is taking to attract buyers, withstand competitive pressure and improve its market position (Thompson and Strickland, 2010). Developing and implementing strategic and operational business plans enable owners to position their businesses to outperform competitors when faced with conflicting demands and limited resources (Cordeiro, 2013; Parnell, 2013).

Whilst micro-enterprises are very often the source of innovation, they are also especially vulnerable to competition from counterparts who introduce new products or services, or improve their production processes, lacking the resources to respond rapidly. Competition (markets) and information related factors, are said to be major challenges. Competition is seen in form of the size of market share in the rural setting. Most of these markets are not expanding and new competitors such as minisuper markets with wide varieties of products for those who were engaged in selling household products are emerging (Mwobobia, 2012).

Consequently, there is need to assist SMEs gauge their performance, learn from their environments about how to survive the competitive environment and continuously seek to reposition their key factors of competitive advantage in line with environmental changes (Rahman, 2012).

According to Ross and Perry (1999), there are different views for describing the four aspects of a firm's competitiveness. First is competition intensity which is explained by increased number of firms or similar product offering in a given industry, which according to Porter (1985) leads to product differentiation to enhance a firm's competitive position. Where competition intensity is high, a firm can identify a unique product dimension that is valued by its customers and position itself to meet those needs using its internal strengths (Ross & Perry, 1999).

A competitive product is the one that satisfies individual consumer needs and preferences, this way, competition intensity is an important aspect of competition (Crosby, 1979). The second aspect of competition is aspect of firm's competitiveness is the product quality, which is measured by the degree of conformance to predetermined specifications and standards. Any absence of specified attributes of a product or deviations from these standards can lead to its inability to compete effectively in the industry (Crosby 1979). A third aspect of competition is a firm's product cost. Garvin and March (1986) describes a products competitiveness in terms of costs and price. A competitive product is one that provides performance at acceptable price or provides conformance at acceptable cost. The firm's marketing experience is the fourth aspect of a firm's competitiveness. The competitiveness of a product or service is a simple unanalyzable property that people learn to recognize only through experience (Garvin & March, 1986).

Statement of the Problem

The Micro, Small and Medium Establishments report (RoK, 2018) indicates that there is high mortality rate of SMEs in Nigeria with a total of 2.2 million businesses having closed from 2012 to 2016. Small and Medium enterprises in Nigeria have been experiencing setbacks which led poor performances after the collapse of manufacturing companies between 2000-2008 whereby 20 companies shut down or suspended production due to economic recession (Ayodeji, 2017) It is argued that in Nigeria, just like in other country, the survival rate of SMEs is only 10-20% (Adeji, Ngugi & Wale, 2018). The SME sector has great potential as we realize that while many SMEs fail, others survive beyond infancy and adolescence, becoming major success stories, creating wealth for their founders and jobs for the communities they serve (Vijay & Ajay, 2019). Evidence is showing the slow decline of the small and medium retail enterprises in areas filtrated by the large retail chains (Mckinsey's Africa consumer insight center, 2012). These have created fierce competition from large retail merchandisers who are penetrating this market with such vigor, strategy, offering virtually all ranges of consumer products and locating themselves in strategic and convenient locations. Previous studies in north east, Nigeria on SMEs have largely focused on the social, economic andadministrative constrains that hinder growth of the retail SMEs (Mullei & Bokea, 2000). Less attention has also been paid on competitive strategies and growth of SMEs using the Ansoff's matrix..

Research Objectives

The general objective is to determine the effect of competitive strategies on growth of small and medium enterprises in east-Nigeria

Specific objectives

The study will be guided by the following specific objectives:

Specific Objectives

i. To determine the effect of market penetration strategy on the growth of SMEs in north east Nigeria

ii. To examine the effect of market development strategy on the growth of SMEs in north east Nigeria

iii. To establish the effect of product development strategy on the growth of SMEs in north east Nigeria

Research Question

1. Does product development strategy influence the growth of SMEs in north east, Nigeria ?

Research Hypothesis:

H_{02} product development strategy has no significant influence on the growth of SMEs in north east, Nigeria

Justification of the study

Managers without strategic understanding of competitive strategy are prone to postponing costs that later escalate when the company is later judged to have violated its competitive aggressiveness. The study is important to start-ups so that they can be able to evaluate their competencies that will enhance their chances of survival and eventual growth. It will serve as a resource for personal decision-making as a self-evaluation aid that can be used to increase prospective entrepreneur's awareness of their strengths and weaknesses with regard to future business endeavors. They will significantly give important lessons on how best to organize the SMEs in order to realize long lasting benefits and optimal contribution to economic growth. The findings of this study are anticipated to be useful to the upcoming SMEs as they will be enabled to better understand the importance of adopting the right strategies and be conversant with best practices in regard to business growth and profit sustainability competitiveness as long as some form of analysis and discussion of their implications for small firm policy. In addition, this research will enable both policy makers and stakeholders to identify the strengths and weaknesses of various strategies/incentives; policy areas are required for growth of MSEs through appropriate policies intervention to enable access of credit and affordable financial services.. Knowing which of their personal competencies (existing and to be developed) might positively affect their business, entrepreneurs can thus act with greater accuracy and confidence towards the accomplishment of their goals. The study would therefore help policy makers formulate policies that are geared towards ensuring SME's survival based on what would increase their entrepreneurial competencies. Research interest in manufacturing sector stems from the consequences of factories on the environment and society in which they are located, and the significant impact on the economy of a nation since it is the basis for determining a nation's economic efficiency

LITERATURE REVIEW

Competitive strategic management is vital if the firm is to succeed, indeed possibly survive. Notwithstanding this, these firms will face numerous problems and crises as they grow, some of which are predictable, others that are not (Lobonțiua & Lobonțiua, 2013). Majumdar (2007) acknowledges that economies have included many policies for the promotion of the SME sector like product reservation, infrastructure support, direct and concessional credit, tax concession, special assessment in procurement of equipment, facility of duty drawback, quality control, and provision of market network (Majumdar, 2007).

Muthaih and Venkatesh (2012) suggest that many factors contribute in the SME growth; similarly, there are many barriers to growth. For small businesses, barriers can be of two types, institutional and financial. An institutional barrier includes the enterprise's interaction with government, issues related to legalization, taxation, and government support. Financial barriers will involve lack of financial resources. Further, SMEs can also face external and internal barriers along with social barriers which would cover aspects of market position of an enterprise, access to right kind of human resources, and access to network (Muthaih & Venkatesh, 2012).

Moreover, Gaskill et al. (2003) assert that small businesses are dependent on the owner's insight, managerial skills, training, education, and the background of the company's leader. Often, lack of these characteristics is the cause of small business' failure (Gaskill et al., 2003). Growth in market share is correlated with profitability; other important forms of growth do exist. Growth in the number of markets served, in the variety of products offered, and in the technologies that are being used to provide goods or services frequently lead to improvements in a firm's competitive ability. Growth means change, and proactive change is essential in a dynamic environment (Kiraka et al, 2013). Burns and Harrison (1996), good management is the key to the growth and development of a smaller firm. This means that managerial tasks in smaller firms are concentrated in the hands of very few people, and possibly even a single person.

Most beneficiaries of WEF are low value enterprises therefore due to high level of competition they therefore need to develop and apply strategies which will make their businesses grow and

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survive competition (Kiraka et al., 2013). A key rationale for supporting the MSME sector is its potential to generate output, employment and income (Kantor, 2001).

Focusing the firm's strategy on sharing equity, identifying a particular market niche, identifying new products, technological sophistication and devolution of decisionmaking are key to growth businesses tend to be those that extend ownership of the firm to others in exchange for equity (Storey, 1994). A firm has a wide range of strategies to pursue in creating and sustaining internal growth through use of Porter's Generic Strategies which include cost leadership, differentiation and focus (Barney, 2002). Besides these, marketing, development of alliances and the focus on the ethical issues comprise important components of the growth strategy (Kazem, 2004).

O'Gorman (2001) notes that 'success strategies' are characterized as high growth businesses. High growth businesses in turn are competitive on product quality, price and new product offering (O'Gorman, 2001). Firms seeking growth on the basis of innovation would essentially be oriented towards continuously offering a product that would take a high rank on the 'state-of-the-art' scale in the market (O'Gorman, 2001). Porter and Stern (2001) attest that business growth is also realizable through innovation, which the OECD (2000) defines as encompassing any new development in firms (Porter & Stern, 2001).

This strategy involves creating or reengineering products or services to meet new market demand, introducing new processes to improve productivity, developing or applying new marketing techniques to expand sales opportunities, and incorporate new forms of management systems and techniques to improve operational efficiency (Porter & Stern, 2001). Production strategies, such as the development of new products and services, technological specialization and focus on innovation, also determined growth (Achtenhagen et al., 2010; Davidsson et al., 2010; Dobbs & Hamilton, 2007; Moreno & Casillas, 2008).

Growth is regarded as the second most important goal of a firm, the most important being firm survival. Aversion to growth has been said to the principal reason why most SMEs stagnate and decline (Clark et al., 2001). Previous research reveals that firm growth is a multidimensional phenomenon, there is substantial heterogeneity in a number of factors associated with firm growth and related research (Delmar et al., 2003). O'Shannassy (2009), however, simply categorized the organization performance in the strategy literature into two measures, namely; strategic (for example sales growth, market share, customer satisfaction, quality) and financial objectives (for example return on asset, return on equity, return on sales).

The commonly used measures of firm growth: (employment growth, sales growth, profit, return on equity [ROE], return on assets [ROA]) and entrepreneurs' perceived growth relative to their competitors in terms of increase in company value (Leona et al., 2010).Growth in market share is correlated with profitability; other important forms of growth do exist. Growth in the number of markets served, in the variety of products offered, and in the technologies that are being used to provide goods or services frequently lead to improvements in a firm's competitive ability. Growth means change, and proactive change is essential in a dynamic environment (Kiraka et al, 2013).

A business or entrepreneurial venture is successful if it is growing. Growth has various connotations: It can be defined in terms of revenue generation, value addition, and expansion in terms of volume of the business. It can also be measured in the form of qualitative features like market position, quality of product, and goodwill of the customers (Kruger, 2004). Business growth is a vital indicator of a flourishing enterprise.

Theoretical Framework

A. Porter's Competitive strategies

This study was based on Porter's competitive strategy theory (1998) in which the main motive is to gain competitive advantage which means the organisation will focus on developing an edge that helps the organisation in getting the maximum sales of their product or service and also help in take it away from the competitors. (Porter, 1998). Porter always maintained in his work of generic strategy that the one thing in which companies need to focus is not to get stuck in the middle when it comes to strategy which means it is very important to choose the right and a perfect generic strategy since the decision to choose a specific type of strategy will help in underpinning every other strategic decision for the company and make it more worthwhile in order to spend right time on right things.

Therefore, when the company is in the process of choosing three generic strategies, it is significant to take into account the competencies of the organisation and its strength into account (Rangan et al., 2012).

Much discussion of small firm strategy is based upon the Porter approach (Burns & Harris, 1996). In this framework, competitive advantage is hypothesized to derive from product market positions based on either cost leadership (selling a standard product at a lower cost than competitors) or market differentiation (selling a product that is unique in some way and therefore commands a higher price). These two strategies can also be distinguished according to their competitive scope. Thus, the strategies may operate over a whole market or be focused upon a particular segment (Megicks, 2002)

As a part of broad market strategies, it is very important to decide before hand whether the company will focus on cost leadership or on differentiation strategy. So in this strategy the company will either depend on cost focused strategy or on differentiation strategy. On the broader basis, the main key is to ensure that the company is adding something extra which as a result serves only that specific market niche. The fact that something extra which can be done through number of ways like reducing costs or by increasing differentiation, it is important to focus on the kind of customers company is serving and the kind of expectation of the customers (Rangan et al., 2012).

There are number of steps which can be followed here in this case. The first one is that for each generic strategy the company will have to focus on SWOT analysis where the company can (Rangan et al., 2012). There are two sources of superior performance namely: locating an industry where industry conditions are good enough to allow a rate of return above the competitive level and having a firm attain a position of advantage viz a viz competitors within an industry to allow it to earn a return in excess of industry average. As competition intensifies, very few industry environments can guarantee same returns, hence the primary goal of a strategy is to establish a position of competitive advantage for a firm (Kirunja, 2011).

Competitive strategy applies when a firm exploits new or unique markets good for strong low cost competitor, segment markets and offer differentiated products and services to the new market segment offer unique features products, focused

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b. Low Cost Leadership Strategy

An organization can increase the profits by reducing the costs and also charging prices which are on the basis of average in the industry. Second method is increasing the market share through charging lower prices and increasing the sales (Porter & Lee, 2013). According to Porter (1998), in cost leadership, a firm sets out to become the low cost producer in its industry. The sources of cost advantage are varied and depend on the structure of the industry. They may include the pursuit of economies of scale, proprietary technology, preferential access to raw materials and other factors. A low cost producer must find and exploit all sources of cost advantage. If a firm can achieve and sustain overall cost leadership, then it will be an above average performer in its industry, provided it can command prices at or near the industry average (Porter, 1998).

The cost reduction efforts of cost leadership strategy can be classified into three main categories: the first one is reducing unit manufacturing costs through higher unit volume, efficient scale facilities, and experience curve; the second one is exercising strict cost control over engineered costs; and the third one is minimizing discretionary costs like R&D (Porter, 1998). The cost leadership strategy requires the sale of a "standard or no-frills" product combined with "aggressive pricing" (Porter, 1980). Thus, the strategy involves making a fairly standardized product and under pricing everybody else (Kiechel, 1981b).

An important requirement of the cost leadership strategy is "heavy up-front capital investment in state-of-the-art equipment" (Porter, 1980). So, Kiechel (1981a) says that in order to maintain cost leadership a firm should therefore "buy the largest, most modern plant in the industry," these are such high stakes. The "low cost" strategy involves the construction of efficient scale facilities, and aggressive pursuit of cost reduction and cost minimization in all functions of the organization, and products offered to customers who are price sensitive (Dess & Davis, 1984).

c. Focus Strategy

Focus strategy which companies use mainly concentrate on specific niche market and also tries to understand the dynamics of the market and the specific needs of the customers within it (Porter & Lee, 2013). The company also focus on developing a uniquely low cost and well specified product or services (Rangan et al., 2012). Luiz and Geoff (2006) cites the importance of market segment and the kind of products the company chooses to offer serve and says that it determines where business will compete effectively, sustainable differential advantages occurs due to superior products. The generic strategy of focus rests on the choice of a narrow competitive scope within an industry (Luiz & Geoff, 2006).

The main motive of these companies to build a strong brand loyal customers and the company is able to do so since these companies serve customers in a unique manner. This is why this specific market segment is less attractive for the competitors. Focus strategy involves targeting activities to selected segment of the market, either by providing goods or services at a lower cost to that segment cost focus or by providing differentiated product or service for the needs of that segments focus strategies enable organization to target their marketing mix decision to their needs of specific customer groups (Rangan et al., 2012).

The focuser selects a segment or group of segments in the industry and tailors its strategy to serving them to the exclusion of others. The focus strategy has two variants. The first one is cost focus a firm seeks a cost advantage in its target segment, while in the second on being differentiation focus a firm seeks differentiation in its target segment. Both variants of the focus strategy rest on differences between a focuser's target segment and other segments in the industry (Luiz & Geoff, 2006).

The target segments must either have buyers with unusual needs or else the production and delivery system that best serves the target segment must differ from that of other industry segments. Cost focus exploits differences in cost behaviour in some segments, while differentiation focus exploits the special needs of buyers in certain segments (Porter, 1998). Anyanga and Nyamita, (2016), posit that SMEs in Kisumu's Kibuye market used service positioning whereby, the business enterprise had identified a specific market segment to serve, to position the service in the market place and consumer mind and the enterprise saw their customers as long term partners and maintain relationship through quality service. (Anyanga & Nyamita, 2016).

Box (2011) conducted a qualitative case study that included 99 small-business owners and entrepreneurs in which business owners fit into three categories— differentiators, cost leaders, or stuck in the middle—when sustaining a business. According to Porter (1980), the three competitive strategies are alternative viable approaches for dealing with environmental forces. Firms that fail to select one of these strategies are "stuck in the middle" and, therefore, almost always doomed to failure. As Porter notes, the "stuck in the middle" firm lacks the investment in low cost structure to compete on price, the industry-wide differentiation to necessarily offset the need for a low cost position, and the focus to achieve differentiation or a low cost within a limited market space (Porter, 1980).

Porter's competitive strategy theory was applied in this study as part of broad organizational strategies, it is very important for women in small businesses to decide before hand whether the company will focus on cost leadership or on differentiation strategy or adding something extra which as a result serves only that specific market niche. As a part of broad market strategies, it is very important to decide before hand whether the company will focus on cost leadership or on differentiation strategy

According to Pallavi (2013), training and development programs play a vital role in every organization. These programs improve Employee Performance at workplace, it updates Employee Knowledge and enhances their personal Skills and it helps in avoiding Managerial Obsolescence. With the use of these programs, it is easier for the management to evaluate the job performance and accordingly take decisions like employee Promotion, rewards, compensations, welfare facilities, etc. These training programs also help the managers in succession planning, employee retention and motivation. It creates Efficient and Effective employees in the Organization. The need for training & development is determined by the employee's performance deficiency, computed as the difference between standard performance and actual performance. Training enhances the overall performance of an organization in various ways. The major areas where employees are normally trained in an organization are Soft- skill development, personality development, Interpersonal relationship, Problem solving techniques, Managerial and Supervisory. Training Program, quality improvement programs, technical processes, quality circle programs, time management skills, employee efficiency development programs, violence prevention programs, regulatory compliances, goal setting and implementation of programs, workplace safety management, workplace communication and so on. Training and development programs improve the quality of work-life by creating an employee supportive workplace. According to Amir and Amen, (2013), the general benefits received from employee training are: increased innovation in strategies and products and reduced employee turnover.¬ increased capacity to adopt new technologies and methods, resulting in financial gain,¬ Increased efficiencies in processes,¬ increased motivation and¬ Increased job satisfaction and morale.¬ According to Athar& Shah, (2015), stated that training has important role in the achievement of organizational goal by integrating the interest of the organization and the workforce. The employees are the assets and the most important resources for organizations so that organizations that provide training to their employees increase their productivity. Therefore, training and development is an important function for the survival of any organization. According to Kum, Cowden & Karodia (2014) again stated that effective employee training leads to an increase in quality of goods and service as a result of potentially fewer mistakes. Consequently, accuracy, effectiveness, good work, safety practices and good customer service can be expected. The researchers concluded in their study effective employees training lead to an increase in quality as a result of potentially with fewer mistake.

d. Theory of Growth

There are various theoretical perspectives which explain the growth of SMEs and associated strategies, but Dobbs and Hamilton (2007) claim that there is no single theory which can adequately give the explanation. The organic/evolution theory by Greiner (1972), cited in Gupta, Guha and Krishnaswami (2013), asserts that firms learn about their efficiency overtime and move through distinguishable stages with each phase containing a relatively calm period of growth and each with a management crisis.

New firms entering the market are unaware of their true efficiencies immediately but as they mature, they are able to uncover their productive efficiencies and adopt strategies befitting the circumstances (Staines, 2005). According to dynamic stage theory by Papadaki and Chami (1982), cited in Levie and Lichtenstein (2010), SMEs have certain characteristics that are associated with the propensity for entrepreneurial behaviour. SMEs with more of these characteristics are more likely to grow faster than those with fewer ones (Papadiki & Chami, 2002).

In other words the attitude of the individual entrepreneur in taking risks, motive of going into self employment, his or her managerial abilities to raise capital and perceive new markets, will determine the growth of the firm. Finally, the life cycle model by McMahon (1998) and similar in principle to the organic theory, explain the growth of an enterprise using the biological metaphor of the "lifecycle" (McMahon, 1998).

Small and Medium Enterprises Growth

Female entrepreneurs find it difficult to start and operate their business because of traditions, customs and societal attitudes towards women. Generally rural woman appear to start business for survival to balance work and family with no intention to grow. Rural women are burdened the family household roles. Because of these women are left with little time for their businesses. The socio-cultural factors influenced the growth of women-owned MSEs in rural areas (Mbiti *et al.*, 2015). Rural women appear not to be driven by profits but rather, by the need to provide for their families or growth, all women entrepreneurs would benefit greatly from a supportive environment that encourages women to “go for it”. Currently, there is a lack of social and cultural support for the role of women as entrepreneurs; women are subject to stereotypes with few visible role models for them at any level. Gender barriers need to be addressed at all levels, from the legal system to the domestic system (Muriungi, 2012).

Women entrepreneurs also need more access to a full range of financial and non-financial support services. The growth of their enterprises is restricted by lack of collateral and flexible finance options (Stevenson & St. Onge). The growth and expansion of SMEs requires sustained investment in working capital. However, at low levels of income, the accumulation of such capital may be difficult. Under such circumstances, microcredit facilities may help small-scale entrepreneurs improve their incomes and accumulate own capital (Atieno, 2001).

Growth can be an objective in itself, it can constitute a yardstick for the success of the manager and his firm, and for the "progress" achieved by the latter (Starbuck, 1965).

Growth has been measured on the basis of an impressive number of variables, the two indicators most widely used by literature being employment and sales (Kirchoff, 1991), for the entrepreneur, it can serve as an indicator of his success. An appropriate combination of access to credit, credit conditions, and adequate financial and 34 operational policies, is the only way to deal with the complex problem of SMEs survival and growth. It is widely recognized that financial institutions play an important role in supporting entrepreneurs who start innovative activities such as new businesses (Mairura, Namusonge & Karanja, 2013).

Growth enterprises are entrepreneurial firms with high possibilities to grow. Yet, not all enterprises’ first and foremost objective was growth. Some enterprises are established merely to exploit a short-time opportunity. Other enterprises like to maintain the enterprise at its existing size. Enterprises that are seeking growth are likely to be interested in innovation than those that were not. Enterprises whose objective was to grow the enterprise, innovation provided a means to achieving growth. Growth-oriented enterprises are characterized by a commitment to long-term growth than short-term profit. Measures of growth of enterprises variable include: employees, turnover, net assets and size (Njeru *et al.*, 2013).

Growth of enterprises in their study was operationalized by annual employee increase, degree of satisfaction on levels of turnover and degree of satisfaction on innovation types (Njeru *et al.*, 2013). Entrepreneurs and small business owners are motivated to solve problems or deliver services better, faster, cheaper than others in the market. Entrepreneurs harness creativity and innovation to seize opportunities and offer alternatives in the marketplace (Muriungi, 2012). Successful entrepreneurs manage risk by closely monitoring business processes and financial obligations, as well as by focusing intently on their market and the challenges of building market share (Muriungi, 2012).

In a number of countries, the scarcity of capital resources inhibits growth, so it is not surprising that access to finance makes growth easier. Market niches allow fast growth firms to exploit the quality of their product, as they tend to compete on quality rather than price. Innovation, particularly amongst small high technology firms is likely to lead to growth In other words; these firms develop high value innovative products that are held in high esteem. A danger for many SMEs is that attitudes to managing uncertainty and risk may lead to short-term decision-making and the strategic objectives are ignored. Day-to-day survival is often behind many decisions taken as SMEs balance the needs of customers with the demands of suppliers and financiers (Storey, 1994). Focusing the firm's strategy on sharing equity, identifying a particular market niche, identifying new products, technological sophistication and devolution of decision-making are key to growth businesses tend to be those that extend ownership of the firm to others in exchange for equity (Storey, 1994).

Empirical review

Product development strtaegy

Product development according to Turner (2010) is a strategy that a company adopts to create new products targeted at its existing markets to achieve growth. This involves extending the product range available to the firm's existing markets. The product development may be obtained by value addition, product differentiation, standardization and product diversification to the existing tea products. Keegan (1989) noted that the success of marketing depends amongst others on the success of the product in satisfying the consumers and if the product fails to satisfy the consumer, any amount of effort to boost the sales may not gain long term success. According to Atikiya (2013) Kenya intends to strategically boost the level of value addition in its niche export markets by increasing manufacturing of local agricultural products tea included. Owino (2012) defines value addition in the context of tea to signify the processing of tea produced or bought in bulk form into products that are sold at the retail level in consumer-ready packets through product modification and diversification with an intention of creating more value for the product. In Kenya, major agricultural products are exported as raw materials with no value addition resulting to low level of competitiveness. Investment opportunities for value adding activities through processing and packaging for agricultural commodities have not been exploited to increase farm incomes and off-farm employment (Kimenyi, 2002). This signifies that Kenyan products are exported as commodities thus affecting the competitiveness of the products in the global markets. Nyangito (2001) informed that value adding to a crop like tea can fetch up to six times more revenue than unpacked tea. Kenyan tea is sold in semi-processed 29 form to exporters who use it to blend lower quality tea from other countries. To ascertain sustainability and retention of the market share in the global market, Kenyan tea processors should diversify from production of only black CTC tea to variety of branded tea products. This would make the country regain its position in the world market and consequently improve farmers' income and ultimately reduce poverty levels (Tea Board of Kenya, 2009). Theuri (2015) attested that value addition in agricultural products is a critical aspect in determining the competitiveness of Kenya's produce in world markets. Kenyan farm products are mostly exported in semi processed form with low-value. This accounts for 91 % of total agriculture related exports. This is contributed by limited ability to add value to agricultural products and high production costs making the Kenyan agricultural exports less competitive in global markets. Todd (2010) noted that as competition escalates in the global market, firms should not only target at producing new products but also develop innovative ways of adding value to the existing products. Cannon (2013) affirmed that product development decisions need to be made after researching the target market and with the needs of that market in mind. In addition, answers to questions like, "What does the customer want and need?" and "How will the customer use it?" may guide decisions on product development. An effective Product - market manager need to consider attributes like quality, design, sizes, warranties, returns, brand name, functionality, colour, safety, repairs, support, styling, and accessories to aid decisions on product development and modification. Jaffee (1993) also noted that product development is based on the extent to which the producer has to adjust the product on the standardization-adaptation continuum in response to different market conditions. To introduce new products into international markets according to Dixie (1989), product life cycle concept should be given remarkable consideration. The idea behind this concept is that if underlying conditions existing in one country are similar to those in another. The product can thus be successful in the new market. Kelegema (2010) noted that tea in its traditional form as 30 brewed beverage is undergoing change to match the changes in consumer preferences and lifestyles. Kenyan tea remains largely unknown in the international market because the exported bulk is used to blend other teas after which is packed using different brands. Maina (2015), Mbui (2016) recommended that Kenyan government should develop a policy on value addition to safeguard the tea from manipulation through blending and which would serve as a guide to tea trade in the global market. In Africa generally, Moon et al. (1995), found that there are no consistent standards for product quality and grading, making it difficult to participate competitively in the international trade. Product specifications are often set by the customer, but agents, standard authorities and trade associations can be useful sources for product standardization. Quality requirements often vary considerably from country to country and consumer to consumer (Sunsplash, 1995). The Kenyan teas which are of high quality has not been standardized hence creating room for the buyers to use it for blending with the cheap teas of low quality to meet the customers preferences. The blended teas lack information of point of origin of the tea making the Kenyan teas lose value and competitiveness in the global market. Murphy (2011) stated that product differentiation as another strategic product practice involves making the product or service more appealing to the customer than the competitor thereby potentially commanding a higher price. The aspect of tailor made product differentiation is lacking in the Kenyan tea resulting in loss of competitiveness and market share. The consumers' tastes and preferences are not static and hence are not met to their expectations given that Kenya has all through traded with the same primary and secondary grades of teas as cited earlier in this study. Product differentiation strategy once adopted would enable market segmentation leading to market expansion as a result of new demand creation. To ensure product differentiation, the tea industry in Kenya has to match its natural advantages and strengths to the characteristics of the market that allows differentiation. This can be possible through new technology adoption that would create the desired 31 product, quality, brand image, and features that consumers crave, and develop a marketing network. Oyeli (2019) observed savanna sugarcane image is fairly strong in the world market but there has been minimal effort to enhance the image and extend it to a larger portion of the tea drinking population. The image can be improved through aggressive and creative marketing. The product development according to this study can be achieved by promoting product diversification such as Tea Extracts and Aromas, production of sugarcane in savanna Adamawa state.

Methodology

Research Design: The study adopted a descriptive research design. The researcher used a cross sectional research design with both qualitative and quantitative methods. The design was appropriate in investigating the empirical and theoretical relationship between the variables.

Target Population

Population is define as the large collection of all subjects from where a sample is drawn. Kumar (2018) define the target population as a group of individuals, objects or items from which samples are taken for measurement. The target population for this study will be the 5362 registered SMEs enterprises registered in Nigeria by December 2017.

Sample Size and Population

187 members of staff and 20 members of customers constitute the respondents for this research work. A total of 150 questionnaires were sent out and 67 were fully answered and returned and used for the analysis.

Methods of Data Collection

Data needed for this work was collected through the use of primary and secondary source.

Primary Sources of Data

The research uses personal interviews amongst staff of the company and few customers, all selected at random. Also, questionnaires were used to collect necessary information to avoid bias.

Method of Data Analysis:. Regression Analysis was used to test the hypotheses.

Descriptive Results

Section C: Product development and SMEs growth

Kindly indicate the level of agreement relating to the following statements on product development Use a scale of 1-5, where 1- strongly disagree, 2- disagree, 3- uncertain, 4- agree, 5- strongly agree.

Statement	1	2	3	4	5
Low Value addition on Ashaka cement affect North east competitiveness					
Up scaling of value addition would enhance north east Competitiveness					
Product differentiation would enhance consumer loyalty thus influencing competitiveness of Nigeria					
Product diversification promotes consumer preference enhancing competitiveness of Kenyan Teas					
Product standardization and certification would enhance competitiveness Nigeria					
Government tax policies reduces competitiveness of the north east					

From the findings 54% of the respondents disagree while 37.2% strongly disagree that selective procedure is a reliable source of employee performance. This yields a cumulative 72.23% of the respondents disagreeing to the statement, 31.4% of the respondents were neutral about the statement, while 7.3% cumulatively agreed.

Regression Model

SMEs survival = $\alpha + \beta 1_{x1} + \mu$

Where the variables are defined as:

Y –SMEs- small and medium scale enterprises

X_1 – product development

α - regression output(constant)

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μ - Error term.

Results and Discussion

Correlation Analysis Results

Correlation results for product development and SMEs growth

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.626[a]	.392	.384	.0211957
a. Predictors: (Constant), product development				

According to the regression study for product development and SMEs growth in Nigeria, product development accounted for 39.2% of the variation in growth as evaluated by ROC (R2=0.392), with other variables accounting for the other 60.8% of the variation..

ANOVA Results for product development and SMEs growth

Model		Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	.020	1	.020	43.933	.000[b]
	Residual	.031	68	.000		
	Total	.050	69			
Predictors: (Constant), product development strategy						

The null hypothesis, according to which there is no connection between product development and SMEs growth, was tested using the F-test. The results of the analysis of variance test in Table 4.2, which show that the significance of the F-statistic =43.933 and p=0.000 is less than the significance level of 0.05 adopted in this study, show that the null hypothesis was rejected and it was determined that there was a significant relationship between product development and SMEs growth. It was also demonstrated that the model ROC=0.04+0.027 (product development) + substantially fit the data.

Conclusion and Recommendation

The general objective of this study was to determine the effect of competitive strategies on growth of small and medium enterprises in east-Nigeria. Considering its conclusions, the study draws the conclusion that market penetration, product development and market development are importance for SMEs' growth. Moreover, the findings show that there is a positive and significant relationship between competitive strategies and the growth of small and medium enterprises in north east Nigeria.

Recommendations of the Study

For the partners (Owners) and managers of SMEs firms operating in Nigeria, there is need to develop and adopt strategies that will ensure that they survive in the industry. Partners should cultivate a culture of scanning the business environment and adopting the appropriate competitive strategies applicable. The firms should know that customer satisfaction always comes first. Also the study recommends that SMEs firms should adopt strategies such as diversification of products to include consultancy & accountancy, charging reasonable fees, expansion to new market & ethical considerations, and efficient and timely service to client.

Entrepreneurs should relook on their competitive advantage strategies in terms of business branches and assets in order to reach the consumer to their door step while they increase customer base as well as creating awareness of the service or product they deal with.

SMEs firms should realize the growth effectively to ensure that large SMEs firms do not outdo small ones in the market. This will ensure survival of small firms as they contribute to job creation, economic development as well as encouraging creativity hence competitive competition.

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