

**EFFECT OF COMPETITIVE AGGRESSIVENESS ON PRODUCT PERFORMANCE:
EVIDENCE FROM MICRO, SMALL, AND MEDIUM ENTERPRISES IN NIGER STATE**

BY

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Abstract

Competitive aggression is the degree of healthy rivalry in entrepreneur behavior that new micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs) are often forced to exhibit in order to compete with existing rivals. The capacity of a product to achieve delivery or performance goals is referred to as product performance. Availability and deliverability are two ways to describe product performance triggered by competitive aggressiveness. This study investigated the effect of competitive aggressiveness on product performance among MSMEs in Niger State. A survey research design was adopted. The population of this study is 454,000 with a sample size of 400 MSMEs. A structured questionnaire designed on a five-point Likert-type questions was used to measure the respondent's concentration of thought in relation to the information sought. The response scales ranges from Strongly disagree = 1, to Strongly Agree = 5. Cronbach's Alpha test was run on the items in the questionnaire and were found to be reliable at 0.866 (86.6%) and 0.869 (86.9%) for competitive aggressiveness and product performance respectively. Descriptive and inferential statistics were used for data analysis and test of hypothesis. Findings revealed that there is a significant positive correlation ($r = 0.997$, $Sig = 0.000$) between competitive aggressiveness and product performance among MSMEs in Niger State. It was concluded that MSMEs owners in Niger State should be encourage on consistent basis to adopt the tactics of competitive aggressiveness in promoting the sales of their products Nevertheless, the study recommends that MSMEs owners in Niger State should respond to market competition through aggressive promotional campaigns by utilizing various distribution channels to reach potential customers across the twenty-five (25) Local Government Areas of Niger State.

Keywords: Competitive, Competition, Aggressiveness, Products, Performance, MSMEs

Introduction

A competitively aggressive business is one that has the propensity to aggressively challenge competitors in order to improve their market position and outperform industry rivals in a marketplace (Patrick, 2018). The market positions of micro, small, and medium-sized business owners who fail to continuously innovate would eventually be eroded by competitors. It also implies that enterprises that are less aggressive than their competitors will soon be caught off guard by their direct market competitors. In particular, a company's profitability and market share increase with the number of total actions it executes at a faster-than-average rate (aggressiveness). In another context, businesses that initiate competitive actions later than their competitors frequently fail in the marketplace. According to Farah and Nina (2016), for a company to be successful in its business endeavour, it must be aggressively competitive in order to beat out competitors. Price reductions and substantial investments in marketing quality and production capacity are examples of aggressive business practices.

Product performance of micro, small, and medium enterprises increasingly rely on implementing competitive aggressiveness. In order to meet customer requirements and compete effectively in the market, it is essential to comprehend both their current product performance and consumer expectations. Therefore, they must also comprehend that production performance requires Micro, Small, and Medium-Sized Enterprises to maximize and increase their productivity levels through efficient operation. The key question for owners of such enterprises is not whether to adopt aggressive promotional campaign, but rather how to do so effectively in order to thrive in today's volatile local and

international markets. Thus, doing so, underscores the feasibility and desirability of implementing competitive aggressiveness among micro, small and medium enterprises in Niger State, while offering guidance on how to develop and activate them effectively. The regulatory agency responsible for micro, small, and medium enterprises in Niger State has primarily focused on promoting vocational skill development for self-employment, without emphasizing the importance of adopting competitive aggressiveness similar to larger industrial companies and hence the resolve to investigate the relationship between competitive aggressiveness and performance of micro, small, and medium enterprises and by assuming that competitive aggressiveness does not have significant positive relationship with performance of micro, small, and medium enterprises in Niger State.

Competitive aggression is the degree of healthy rivalry in entrepreneur behavior that new micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs) are often forced to exhibit in order to compete with existing rivals. It encapsulates the notion of outperforming competitors (Ata, 2011). Competitive aggressiveness refers to the level of competition and head-to-head posturing that new entrants are typically required to engage in to compete with established competitors (Goodle, Kuratko, Hornsby & Covin, 2011). It has been suggested that competitive strategy facilitates the success of Micro, Small, and Medium-Sized Enterprises. According to Vojtovi (2016), competitive aggressiveness refers to a company's willingness to directly and aggressively challenge its competitors in order to gain entry or enhance its position, i.e., surpass competitors in its market space. In our opinion, it could also be defined by an offensive stance or aggressive responses to the actions of competitors. According to Rahman, Civelek, and Kozubikova (2016), a company with a strong competitively aggressive stance can be a decisive participant in a field of competitors and act firmly to protect or improve its position. Price reductions, increased marketing expenditures, quality enhancements, and production capacity expansion are all examples of aggressive measures. This may occur when a company advertises its products in markets identified by rivals, or when it analyses and exploits rivals' weaknesses. This is also a straightforward business response to competitor threats. Due to the competitive environment, academics have advocated for the adoption of competitive aggression among business enterprises, particularly in the micro, small, and medium enterprise sector (Belás & Sopková, 2016).

According to Ahmedova (2015), competitive strategy is about being different. It entails consciously selecting a new set of activities to create a unique value combination. Competitive strategy involves establishing a competitive position, differentiating the enterprise from competitors from the client's perspective, and creating value through a combination of activities not employed by competitors, he continues. In an earlier work, he argued that competitive strategy is a combination of the firm's ends (goals) and the means (policies) by which it seeks to achieve those ends. The current high mortality rate of micro, small, and medium businesses in the global business environment is disheartening to consider, and it poses a threat to Bangladesh's entire economic system (Jahan & Al-Asheq, 2020). It places a significant financial burden on the nation's economy and wastes valuable resources. The owner of a business should constantly consider challenges and be prepared to meet them with pre-planned competitive strategies (Kehinde, 2016). Survival of small and medium-sized businesses necessitates a methodical examination of the challenges they face, the development of appropriate methods for addressing them, and a comprehensive understanding of the business environment.

According to Afande and Maina (2015), the capacity of a product to achieve delivery or performance goals is referred to as product performance. Availability and deliverability are two ways to describe product performance triggered by competitive aggressiveness. The product can be a physical object or an intangible product that is mass-produced or mass-manufactured with a specific number of units (Adeniran, Egwuonwu & Egwuonwu, 2015). Intangible products are service-based, such as the tourism and hotel industries, or based on codes, such as cell phone credits. Automobiles, disposable razors, machine tools, television sets, loaves of bread, and cosmetics are typical examples of mass-produced tangible objects. Packaging must be taken into account as well. Among the services provided by service industries are hospital care, dental care, and accounting. Thus, Audretsch (2009), contended that the harsh realities of competition have compelled managers to reevaluate their practices and develop effective methods for measuring the success of their organisations. According to Ayedun et al. (2014), an ambitious product performance goal can help define the development process and ultimately

lead to a game-changing product launch. Product performance influences the operating characteristics of Micro, Small, and Medium-Sized Enterprises (Akinyele, 2010).

According to Armstrong and Overton (2010), this feature has quantitative attributes and an effect on the objective rating and individual performance factors of a product. According to Asiegbu, Igwe, and Akekue-Alex (2012), it is more difficult to develop overall performance when it involves features that not all consumers require. Awunyo-Victor, Ayimey, and Gayibor (2013) stated in their submission that consumers and suppliers frequently disagree regarding product performance, particularly when deliverables are not specified in the specifications. In support of this claim, Attih and Adams (2014) state that the performance of a product frequently influences repeat purchases. According to Ayedun et al. (2014), functional requirements-based choices may influence whether product performance differences are quality disparities or not. This suggest that organizations, particularly micro, small, and medium enterprises must comprehend their current performance and consumer expectations in order to effectively meet their needs and compete in the market.

Research Question

This study seeks to answer the following research question:

RQ: What is the relationship between competitive aggressiveness and product performance among micro, small, and medium enterprises in Niger State?

Hypothesis

This study steps up further to explore and test the extent of the relationship the exist between the two variables of competitive aggressiveness and product performance by assuming:

Ho: That ccompetitive aggressiveness does not have significant positive relationship with performance of micro, small, and medium enterprises in Niger State.

Methodology

The research design adopted for this study was the survey research design. The survey research design was appropriate because it makes it possible for the respondents to express their opinions on the variables under investigation which symbolized their perception and views across the twenty-five (25) Local Government Areas spread across the three Geo-political Zones of Niger State, Nigeria. The population of this study is four hundred and fifty-four thousand (454,000) Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (Niger State government, 022). To obtain a statistically acceptable population sample size from the population, Yamane (1967) formula with a 5% precision/error margin was applied and this give us a sample size of 399.6. The number was rounded to 400 because otherwise we would have to find a fraction of a human, which is the unit of our sample. This study used multistage sampling technique. A structured questionnaire designed on a five-point Likert-type questions was used to measure the respondent's concentration of thought in relation to the information sought. The response scales are Strongly Agree = 5, Agree = 4, Neutral = 3, Disagree = 2, and Strongly Disagree = 1. The content and construct validity of the instrument was examined through a pilot test. The test revealed that it took each of the respondents an average time of between 10 to 15 minutes to fill the questionnaire with the aid of a research assistant and thereby suggesting that the instrument is valid. In assessing the level of reliability of the instrument, a Cronbach's Alpha test was run on the items in the instrument. It was found that the items on the instrument were reliable at 0.866 (86.6%) and 0.869 (86.9%) for competitive aggressiveness and product performance respectively. However, Bolarinwa (2015), considers that a questionnaire item is reliable if the result of the value of Cronbach's Alpha is higher than 0.70.

Table 1 below show the summary of Cronbach Alpha (α) Reliability Test result

| Variables | No of items | Alpha (α) |
|----------------------------|--------------------|------------------------------------|
| Competitive Aggressiveness | 5 | 0.866 |
| Production Performance | 5 | 0.869 |

Source: SPSS Version 26.0 Output

Each of the variables in the table has more than 0.70 in value. Hence the instrument was considered valid and reliable for use.

Results

Data were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistical methods. The descriptive phase involved simple percentage, tables, the mean, and the grand mean. The grand mean was used to interpret the responses of respondents because it represents the sum of the respective means of each questionnaire item related to the research constructs. A manually calculated mean score of 3.0 (that is, $1 + 2 + 3 + 4 + 5/5$ items = $15/5 = 3.0$) was selected and interpreted as the benchmark for agreement with the questionnaire item's statement. On the inferential phase, Pearson Product Moment Correlation (PPMC) analysis was used to the study's hypothesis. Thus, to describe the relationship between competitive aggressiveness and performance of micro, small, and medium enterprises in Niger State, responses collated from the field were presented in tables, percentages and interpreted in the following sections, beginning with restatement of research question. Restatement of research question on the relationship between competitive aggressiveness and performance of micro, small and medium enterprises in Niger State.

RQ: What is the relationship between competitive aggressiveness and product performance among micro, small, and medium enterprises in Niger State?

Table 2: Descriptive Analysis of Competitive Aggressiveness

| S/N | Items Measuring Competitive Aggressiveness | SA (5) | A (4) | N (3) | D (2) | SD (1) | Mean |
|-------------------|--|-------------------------------------|---------------------------|---------------------------|--------------------------|---------------------------|---------------|
| 1 | Our competitive strategy is based on being the business low-cost provider. | Freq 178 Perc 44.5 | 120 30.0 | 20 5.0 | 54 13.5 | 28 7.0 | 3.915 |
| 2 | My competitive strategy is driven by my expertise on how to create greater value for customers. | Freq 135 Perc 33.8 | 136 34.0 | 44 11.0 | 50 12.5 | 35 8.8 | 3.715 |
| 3 | I am constantly investing in generating new ideas that give me an advantage compared to my competitors | Freq 171 Perc 42.8 | 162 40.5 | 48 12.0 | 19 4.8 | | 4.213 |
| 4 | Our product has a unique characteristic that differentiate it from other similar ones. | Freq 61 Perc 15.3 | 64 16.0 | 51 12.8 | 95 23.8 | 129 32.3 | 2.583 |
| 5 | Head-to-head posturing with established competitors is competitive aggressiveness. | Freq 88 Perc 22.0 | 110 27.5 | 116 29.0 | 55 13.8 | 31 7.8 | 3.423 |
| Grand Mean | | | | | | | 3.5698 |

Source:Data Analysis (2024)

Table 2 the above is the descriptive analysis of the items measuring competitive aggressiveness. The table revealed that one hundred and seventy-eight (178) of the respondents representing (44.5%) strongly agreed with the statement that competitive strategy is based on being the business low-cost producer, while one hundred and twelve (112) of the same respondents representing (30.0%) only agreed with the statement and as low as twenty (20) of the respondents representing (5.0%) were neutral to the statement, fifty-four (54) of the respondents representing (13.5%) only disagreed with the statement and thirty-eight (38) of the respondents representing (7.0%) strongly disagreed with the statement. The table also showed that one hundred and thirty-five (135) of the respondents representing (33.8%) strongly agreed with the statement that their competitive strategy is driven by their expertise on how to create greater value for customers, while one hundred and thirty-six (136) of the respondents representing (34.0%) agreed with the same statement, forty-four (44) of respondents representing (11.0%) were neutral to the statement, fifty (50) of the respondents representing (12.5%) disagreed with the statement and as few as thirty-five (35) of the same respondents representing (8.8%) strongly disagreed with the statement.

The table shows that one hundred and seventy-one (171) of the respondents representing (42.8%) strongly agreed with the statement that they are constantly investing in generating new ideas that give

more advantage compared to their competitor while one hundred and sixty-two (162) of the same respondents representing (40.5%) agreed with the statement, forty-eight (48) of the respondents representing (12.0%) were neutral to the statement and only nineteen (19) of the respondents representing (4.8%) disagreed with the statement. The table shows that sixty-one (61) of the respondents representing 15.3% strongly agreed with the statement that their product has a unique characteristics that differentiate it from other ones, while sixty-four (64) of the same respondents representing (16.0%) agreed with the statement, also only fifty-one (51) of the respondents representing (12.8%) were neutral to the statement, ninety-five (95) of the respondents representing (23.8%) disagreed with the statement and one hundred and twenty-nine (129) of the same respondents representing (32.3%) strongly disagreed with the statement. The table also shows that eighty-eight (88) of the respondents representing (22.0%) strongly agreed with the statement that head-to-head posturing with established competitors is competitive aggressiveness, while one hundred and ten (110) of the respondents representing (27.5%) agreed to the statement, one hundred and sixteen (116) of respondents representing (29.0%) were neutral to the statement, also fifty-five (55) of the respondents representing (13.8%) disagreed with the statement and as few as thirty-one (31) of the respondents representing (7.8%) strongly disagreed with the statement.

Table 3: Descriptive Analysis of Product Performance

| S/N | Items Measuring Product Performance | | SA (5) | A (4) | N (3) | D (2) | SD (1) | Mean |
|-------------------|---|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|---------------|
| 6 | Core product (intangible) is the benefit of the product that makes it valuable to user. | Freq | 183 | 123 | 12 | 54 | 28 | 3.948 |
| | | Perc | 45.8 | 30.8 | 3.0 | 13.5 | 7.0 | |
| 7 | Actual product is the tangible, physical product. user can get some use out of it. | Freq | 135 | 131 | 49 | 50 | 35 | 3.703 |
| | | Perc | 33.8 | 32.8 | 12.3 | 12.5 | 8.8 | |
| 8 | Augmented product is the non-physical part of the product. It usually consists of lots of added value, for which a user may or may not pay a premium. | Freq | 171 | 170 | 40 | 19 | | 4.233 |
| | | Perc | 42.8 | 42.5 | 10.0 | 4.8 | 0.0 | |
| 9 | My enterprise product performance is measured in terms of its ability to meet delivery or performance objectives. | Freq | 56 | 61 | 59 | 95 | 129 | 2.550 |
| | | Perc | 14.0 | 15.3 | 14.8 | 23.8 | 32.3 | |
| 10 | On the whole, my enterprise product has the best features of core, actual and augmented product that stands the test of competition. | Freq | 93 | 110 | 108 | 58 | 31 | 3.440 |
| | | Perc | 23.3 | 27.5 | 27.0 | 14.5 | 7.8 | |
| Grand Mean | | | | | | | | 3.5748 |

Source: Data Analysis (2024)

Table 3 the above is the descriptive analysis of the items measuring product performance. The table revealed that one hundred and eighty-three (183) of the respondents representing (45.8%) strongly agreed with the statement that core product (intangible) is the benefit of the product that makes it valuable to users, while one hundred and twenty-three (123) of the respondents representing (30.8%) agreed with the statement, twelve of the respondents representing (3.0%) agreed with the statement, however, fifty-four (54) of the respondents representing (13.4%) only disagreed with the statement and twenty-eight (28) of the respondents representing (7.0%) strongly disagreed with the statement. The table also shows that one hundred and thirty-five (135) of the respondents representing (33.89%) strongly agreed with the statement that their actual product is the tangible, physical product user can get some use out of it, while one hundred and thirty-one (131) of the respondents representing (32.8%) agreed with the statement, forty-nine (49) of the respondents representing (12.3%) were neutral of the statement, however, fifty (50) of the respondents representing (12.5%) only disagree with the statement and thirty-five (35) of the respondents representing (8.5%) strongly disagreed with the statement.

The table above shows that one hundred and seventy-one (171) of the respondents representing (42.8%) strongly agreed with the statement that their augmented product is the non-physical part of the product and it usually consist of lots of added value for which a user may or may not pay premium, while one hundred and seventy (170) of the respondents representing (42.5%) agreed with the

statement, forty (40) of the respondents representing (10.0%) were neutral of the statement, however, nineteen (19) of the respondents representing (4.8%) only disagreed with the statement. The table above shows that fifty-six (56) of the respondents representing (14.0%) strongly agreed with the statement that their enterprise product performance is measured in terms of its ability to meet delivery or performance objectives, while sixty-one (61) of the respondents representing (15.3%) agreed with the statement, fifty-nine (59) of the respondents representing (14.8%) were neutral to the statement, however, ninety-five (95) of the respondents representing (23.8%) only disagreed with the statement and one hundred and twenty-nine (129) of the respondents representing (32.3%) strongly disagreed with the statement.

The table above shows that ninety-three (93) of the respondents representing (23.3%) strongly agreed with the statement that on the whole, their enterprise product has the best features of core, actual and augmented product that stands the test of competition., while one hundred and ten (110) of the respondents representing (27.5%) agreed with the statement, more so, one hundred and eight (108) of the respondents representing (27.0%) were neutral to the statement, however, fifty-eight (58) of the respondents representing (14.5%) only disagreed with the statement and thirty-one (31) of the respondents representing (7.8%) strongly disagreed with the statement. The analysis above shows that large proportion of the respondents accept that, competitive aggressiveness conforms with product performance, with grand mean being 3.5698 in table 2 which is greater than the minimum bench mark of 3.0 mean. When we compare this in terms of closeness to the result of Table 3 on product performance with grand mean of 3.5748, it can be concluded that there is a significant positive relationship between competitive aggressiveness and product performance or there is possibility of a very good cause and effect relationship between competitive aggressiveness and product performance. This level of responses has answered our research question above.

Test of Hypothesis

Restatement of research hypothesis (Ho) on the relationship between competitive aggressiveness and performance of micro, small and medium enterprises in Niger State.

Ho: Competitive aggressiveness does not have significant positive relationship with performance of micro, small, and medium enterprises in Niger State

Table 4: Pearson product moment correlation on the relationship between competitive aggressiveness and performance of micro, small and medium enterprises in Niger State

| | | Competitive Aggressiveness | Product Performance |
|----------------------------|----------------------------|----------------------------|---------------------|
| Competitive Aggressiveness | Pearson Correlation | 1 | .997** |
| | Sig. (2-tailed) | | .000 |
| | N | 400 | 400 |
| Product Performance | Pearson Correlation | .997** | 1 |
| | Sig. (2-tailed) | .000 | |
| | N | 400 | 400 |

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Source: SPSS Version 26.0 Output (2024)

This hypothesis (Ho) was tested using Pearson Product Moment Correlation (PPMC). The variables involved are competitive aggressiveness, derived from descriptive analysis items 1-5, and product performance, derived from questionnaire items 6-10. The correlation analysis results are summarized in Table 4.

Discussion

Table 4 presents the results of the Pearson Product Moment Correlation (PPMC) analysis conducted to examine the impact of competitive aggressiveness on product performance in micro, small, and medium enterprises in Niger State. The analysis aimed to test the null hypothesis (H0). The table reveals that there is a significant positive correlation ($r = 0.997$, $Sig = 0.000$) between competitive

aggressiveness and product performance among micro, small and medium enterprises in Niger State. This indicates that competitive aggressiveness has a significant influence on product performance among micro, small, and medium enterprises in Niger State.

Based on the findings of the PPMC analysis, we reject the null hypothesis (H₀), which suggests that the level of competitive aggressiveness does not significantly affect product performance in these enterprises. Instead, we conclude that the level of aggressiveness displayed by competitors has a significant effect on the product performance of micro, small, and medium-sized enterprises in Niger State. This implies that higher levels of competitive aggressiveness in the marketplace are associated with better product performance in these businesses. These findings align with previous research by Alhakimi and Mahmoud (2020), who found a positive relationship between competitive aggressiveness and product performance management practices in firms across various industries in Yemen.

Conclusion

Since findings from descriptive and inferential statistics of this study has severally demonstrated that a strong relationship between competitive aggressiveness and product performance in MSMEs exist, we conclude that micro, small and medium enterprise owners in Niger State should be encourage on consistent basis to adopt the tactics of competitive aggressiveness in promoting the sales of their product.

Recommendations

This study recommends that:

1. MSMEs owners in Niger State should respond to market competition through aggressive promotional campaigns by utilizing various distribution channels to reach potential customers
2. Doing this on consistent basis will also enhance their productivity and consequently address some of the challenges contributing to business failure

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