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Continuous Production and Competitive Advantage in Selected Aluminum Company in South- South, Nigeria

Dr. Odita, A.
Department of Business Administration, Delta state university, Abraka, Nigeria 08034854581

Dr. Kifordu, A. A
Department of Business Administration, Delta state university, Abraka, Nigeria

Nwankwo, Catherine Nkechi
Department of Business Administration, Nnamdi Azikwe University, Awka, Nigeria.

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ABSTRACT: *The study investigated Continuous Production and Competitive Advantage in Selected Aluminum Companies in South- South, Nigeria, with specific objectives: to examine the relationship between mass production and customer collaboration, to determine the influence of process production on customer retention, to investigate the impact of assembly production on customer advocacy. The Study adopted a descriptive research method which is structural deigned questionnaire techniques that allows the gathering of data from desired respondents that will be used for analysis, the data employed for the study was primary data. The primary data used for analysis were response gathered from selected aluminium companies in south-south Nigeria. This study considered the total number of seventy-five (75) respondents. The research assign Alphabet to the items responds VE= Very effective, E=Effective, U= Undecided and I = Ineffective. The data analysis method used in this study is percentage frequency counts to determine the result of each items in the research questions and mean value decision rule is 2.5. SPSS was used to determine the decision rule of mean.*

KEYWORDS*:* continuous production, competitive advantage, aluminum, South- South, Nigeria

INTRODUCTION

Continuous production is a flow production method used to manufacture, produce, or process materials without interruption. Continuous production is called a continuous process or a continuous flow process because the materials, either bulk or fluids that are being processed are continuously in motion, undergoing chemical reactions or subject to mechanical or heat treatment. It also deals with decision-making related to production processes so that the resulting goods or service is produced according to specification, in the amount and by the schedule demanded and at minimum cost (Portal, 2017).

Continuous production is concerned with the design, planning, and control of systems for the production of goods and the provision of services. In the past there was a belief that the "operations" function of a business should simply provide support for marketing (DeSouza, 2012). Maa (2010) stated that competitive advantage is a flow of production method used to manufacture, produce, or process materials without interruption while continuous production is called a continuous process or a continuous flow process because the materials, either dry bulk or fluids that are being processed are continuously in motion, undergoing chemical reactions or subject to mechanical or heat treatment.

Continuous production aims at simplifying the continuous tasks to get work done in an organization, most especially in a manufacturing company. It places any organization ahead its contemporaries in a given market. These performances would not be feasible if the model does not properly design and implement. Hence, there will be low or very poor customer collaboration, retention and advocacy which tend to reduce organization performance as planned by the strategic management of the Aluminum industries.

Aluminum industries globally are facing extraordinary challenges; new energy and resource-efficiency requirements in the development of transportation, electronics, building, construction, and other industries are the primary drivers of light metal demand; however, some issues must be seriously considered such as climate change and the environment, population expansion and urbanization, inventions and new goods and technology to meet customers demand.

Objectives of the Study

The general objective of the study is to investigate continuous production and competitive advantage. The specific objectives are:

1) To examine the relationship between mass production and customer collaboration.
2) To determine the influence of process production on customer retention.
3) To investigate the impact of assembly production on customer advocacy.

Research Questions

1. What is the relationship between mass production and customer collaboration?
2. How does process production influence on customer retention?
3. What is the impact of assembly production on customer advocacy?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Continuous Production

Continuous production is a type of production system in which materials being processed are continuously in motion. Continuous production, like mass production, is a flow production method. Continuous production ensures a company can keep up with increasing consumer demand. Increased worker safety: With continuous production, materials are handled fully by machinery and flow through a sequence by conveyors or other transfer equipment.

In recent time, there have been commercial, manufacturing and marketing challenges militating against the effective production of aluminium sheets. Predominantly, there is a challenge of safety during the production of aluminium due to the increased demand through modernization which involves the use of heavily mechanized methods and extreme heat. With the increased demand in aluminium sheets as there has been a recent upsurge in urbanization, shortage of producers (that is staff) has limited continuous production in the aluminium industry. According to Cristian & Stratyinski (2013), any mistakes early in operation can set companies back and take substantial capital to fix.

Daneshjo Naqib, Cristian, Stratyinski & Mohamed (2013) cited some of the importance of continuous production to the business firm: accomplishment of firm's objectives**,** helps to introduce new products**,** helps to face competition**:** optimum utilization of resources**,** minimizes cost of production

Competitive Advantage

Pablos, (2006) explained that competitive advantage of a global organization a hence, competitive advantage lies to a great degree in its aptitude in order to recognize and transfer tactical knowledge among various geographic locations**.** Competitive advantage is obtained when an organisation develops or acquires a set of attributes (or execution actions) that allow it to outperform its competitors (Wang, 2014).

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.

Differentiation: In a differentiation strategy a firm seeks to be unique in its industry along some dimensions that are widely valued by buyers. It selects one or more attributes that many buyers in an industry perceive as important, and uniquely positions itself to meet those needs. It is rewarded for its uniqueness with a premium price.

Focus: The generic strategy of focus rests on the choice of a narrow competitive scope within an industry. 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.

(a) In cost focus a firm seeks a cost advantage in its target segment, while in (b) 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. 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.

Mass Production and Customer Collaboration

Mass production is the continuous production of standardized products, usually along an assembly production. It involves making products in large quantities so that they can be provided to the masses. This type of production is able to maintain a consistent level of quality of output, but comes at the cost of a lack of flexibility. Ford identified this as an issue and rewarded his employees with wages that far exceeded the industry average. This was only achievable do to the vast efficiencies that mass production achieved (Beaudreau, 2009).

Whilst efficiency and output increased, there was one catch – adaptability. With the assembly production running at speeds never seen before, it had to standardize production. Henry Ford demonstrated this succinctly by stating that consumers could 'have any color as long as it was black'. This is because mass production requires standardization in order to benefit from increased efficiency. In turn, this makes the product more affordable and therefore available to the masses (Hounshell, David, 2011).

Mass production, also known as flow production or continuous production, is the production of substantial amounts of standardized products in a constant flow, including and especially on assembly productions. Together with job production and batch production, it is one of the three main production methods (Portal, 2017).

The recent competitive market has compelled feel necessity to every company either it is service provider or manufacturing based company, almost all of them are offering customer support in some level in some practice. Regardless of the numerous presence of such a service, though understanding of how customers' involvement its use in their relations with companies is vague. Service can be simply a general matter or it can rather be viewed as company-specific (Grönroos, 2006; Lovelock & Gummesson, 2004; Vargo & Lusch, 2004).

Loomba (2008) stated that customer support can be simply defined as set of activities that ensures product availability for trouble free use to consumers over its useful lifespan. Customer collaboration can be generally viewed as product support as added value, after sales service or simply service. For every service provider customer support is must to achieve customers satisfaction which also spotlighted by many researchers. Customer collaboration provides competitive advantage over other homogeneous products and services (Goffin & New 2011).

Companies are increasingly looking to Customer collaboration as potential source of competitive advantage to win market share. In this technological revolutionary era it is hard to use each and every appliance without support of technical persons and to reduce this gap of knowledge regarding products almost every company are emphasizing more on customer support. This plays most important role for highly technology based company (Lawless & Fisher, 2011). Good customer collaboration is essential for succeeding customer satisfaction. It can increase success rate of services and can directly contribute to competitive advantage.

Process Production and Customer Retention

Process Production this system is used to produce things that have a consistent and strong demand. At different phases of the manufacturing process, a same raw material can be turned into several types of products, such as the processing of crude oil in a refinery — we obtain kerosene, gasoline, and so on. Production flows can be categorized based on the nature of the manufacturing process. Accountlearning.com (2022)

Analytical Process of Manufacturing: A raw material is broken down into several products throughout the analytical process of production. For example, crude oil is separated into gas, naphtha, and gasoline. Similarly, coal is processed to produce coke, coal, gas, coal-tar, and other products.

Customer retention has been shown to be a primary goal in firms that practice process production. While the precise meaning and measurement of customer retention can vary between industries and firms (Aspinall, 2011) there appears to be a general consensus that focusing on customer retention can yield several economic benefits (Dawkins & Reichheld, 2014). Finally, retained customers may pay higher prices than newly acquired customers, and are less likely to receive discounted offers that are often made to acquire new customers. All of these conditions combine to increase the net present value of retained customers.

In particular, the connections between customer retention and shareholder value have been subject to scrutiny. Gupta (2014) cited that a 1 per cent increase in customer retention had almost five times more impact on firm value than a 1 per cent change in discount rate or cost of capital. As a result of this research, the business case for marketers to focus on the management of customer retention is becoming more clearly established. However, the mainstream marketing literature offers very little guidance on specific managerial practices that are associated with high levels of customer retention (DeSouza, 2012).

Assembly Production and Customer Advocacy

An assembly production is a production process that breaks the manufacture of a good into steps that are completed in a pre-defined sequence. Assembly productions are the most commonly used method in the continuous production of products. They reduce labor costs because unskilled workers are trained to perform specific tasks. Rather than hire a skilled craftsperson to put together an entire piece of furniture or vehicle engine, companies hire workers only to add a leg to a stool or a bolt to a machine (Pine, 2013). Production companies allowed the individualization of products due to which efficient flow line systems for low volume of products have been developed and a modern terminology of mass customization has been introduced. In assembly productions work pieces are moved down the assembly production from one station to another for processing. The average time taken by a station to process a work piece is termed as cycle time (Mather, 2010). Customer advocacy is a specialized form of customer support in which companies focus on what is deemed to be best for the customer. It is a change in a company's culture that is supported by customer-focused customer service and marketing techniques. Every brand wants to make its customer happy, and most will be satisfied knowing their customers have great things to say about

them. However, the efforts should never stop there. While positive customer feedback is essential to brand success, taking proactive measures toward turning these satisfied customers into brand advocates is key to long – term loyalty and attracting new customers in the process.

Theoretical Review

This study anchored on the Theory of Constraints (TOC) by Eliyahu, M.G. and Jeff, C. 1984. The Theory of Constraints is an organizational change method that is focused on profit improvement. A constraint is any factor that limits the organization from getting more of whatever it strives for, which is usually profit. The Goal focuses on constraints as bottleneck processes in a job-shop manufacturing organization.

According to Goldratt, organizational performance is dictated by constraints. These are restrictions that prevent an organization from maximizing its performance and reaching its goals. A great way of doing this is to identify and eliminate "bottlenecks", or things that are holding you back. Constraint can involve people, suppliers, information, equipment or even policies, and can be internal or external to an organization.

The theory says that every system, no matter how well it performs, has at least one constraint that limits its performance – this is the system's "weakest link". The theory also believe that, a system can have only one constraint at a time, and that other areas of weakness are "non – constraints" until they become the weakest link. The theory of constraints provides five focusing steps for identifying and eliminating constraints (bottleneck) in the manufacturing process.

- **Identify the Constraints**: in this step, manufacturing process is reviewed to identify the constraints. A simple but often effective technique is to literally walk through the manufacturing process looking for indications of the constraint.
- **Exploit the Constraints**: in this step, the objective is to make quick improvements to the throughput of the constraint using currently available resources (i.e. make the most of what you have). This step focuses on quick wins and rapid relief; leaving more complex and substantive changes for later.
- **Subordinate and Synchronize to the Constraints**: in this step, focus is on non-constraint equipment. The primary objective is to support the needs the constraint (i.e. subordinate to the constraint). Efficiency of non- constraint equipment is secondary concern as long as constraint operation is not adversely impacted.
- **Elevate Performance of the Constraints**: in this step, more substantive changes are implemented to "break" the constraint. These changes may necessitate a significant investment of time and/or money (e.g. adding equipment or hiring more staff).
- **Repeat the Process**: in this step, the objective is to ensure that the five focusing steps are not implemented as a one- off improvement project. Instead, they should be implemented as a continuous improvement process. This step is a reminder to never become complacent- aggressively improve the current constraint and then immediately move on to the next constraint..

Empirical Review

Alinaghian, (2012) empirically reviewed that the On-going new technology development in the area of 'Continuous Production' (CP) has enabled potential for significant step changes within the Pharmaceutical sector e.g. shifting from traditional 'batch' to 'continuous' processing has implications for (a) product variety, consistency and functionality (b) energy and resource efficiency (c) inventory and customization options and (d) overall industry structure. While other industries, such as oil, gas, petrochemicals, polymers, and food currently operate in CM mode; extensive use of CM is still relatively new to the pharmaceutical industry where the current adoption rate of continuous processing is approximately 5 %. Despite the fact that 50% of reactions in pharma could benefit from a continuous process based on e.g. micro-reactor technology, the industry still dominated by batch processes and it is estimated that rejected batches, rework and investigations can equate to as much as 25% of pharmaceutical company revenues.

Ogala (2020) examined competitive advantage and organizational performance in, Delta State. A 12 item validated structured questionnaire served as the research instrument to 125 staff and customers of the selected firms in Delta State. Two objectives and hypotheses to examine the impact of resource availability on organizational performance and to determine the effect of research and development performance guided the study. The major analytical tools used were correlation and multiple regression analysis. Primary data was used on a sample of 125 members of staff. It was found that there is a strong relationship between resource availability, research and development, and firm performance. The researcher therefore, concluded that Resource availability positively affects the firm strategic performance in the firms selected. Bringing together expertise and capabilities from various organizations improves the performance of a product.

METHODOLOGY

A structural designed questionnaire was used to gather information to elicit responses which is a descriptive research method. The questionnaire was given to five selected aluminium companies in south south Nigeria (Benco aluminium, Benin, Merich aluminium, Calabar, Golden aluminium and steel products, Bayelsa, Aluseam aluminium company, Portharcourt and Yem-Yem multipurpose aluminium and doors, Warri) through a google form to their whatsapp number. The study sampled seventy five (75) respondents including directors, managers and staff who can respond to the items in the structurally designed questionnaire. With a likert scale the study assigned alphabet to the items responds VE= Very effective, E=Effective, U= Undecided and I = Ineffective. The data analysis method used in this study is percentage frequency counts to determine the result of the each items in the research questions and mean value decision rule is 2.5. SPSS was used to determine the decision rule of mean.

Table 1. Research Question 1 and Items. What is the relationship between mass production and customer collaboration?

Items	VE	E	U	I	Total	MEAN
Quality of output	25(33.3%)	30(40%)	15(20%)	5(6.6%)	75	2.61
standardized products	30(40%)	20(26.67%)	5(6.67%)	20(26.67)	75	2.83
lack of flexibility	10(13.33%)	15(20%)	25(33.3%)	25(33.3%)	75	2.39
specification	30(40%)	25(33.33%)	10(13.33 %)	10(13.33 %)	75	2.63
adaptability	25(33.3%)	25(33.3%)	15(20%)	10(13.33 %)	75	2.63
GRAND MEAN						**2.62**

The table above represents the responds given by the respondent in respect of the items in the research questions and item. 33.3% VE and 40% E of the respondent agreed that quality of output on customer collaboration and standardized products was 40% VE and 26.67% E. lack of flexibility 13.33% VE and 15% E this signifies that there is no relationship between lack of flexibility and customer collaboration, while 13.33% I and U, 33.33% E and 40% VE for specification as a factor for mass production and customer collaboration%. Finally, adaptability 33.3% VE, 33.3% E, 20%U and 13.33%I responses. The grand mean is 2.65 which indicate that there is significant the relationship between mass production and customer collaboration since 2.62 >2.5.

Table 2. Research Question and Item. How does process production influence on customer retention?

Items	VE	E	U	I	Total	MEAN
purchase increase	30(40%)	20(26.67%)	5(6.67%)	20(26.67)	75	2.65
Reliability	30(40%)	25(33.3%)	15(20%)	5(6.67)	75	2.76
quality assurance	25(33.3%)	25(33.3%)	15(20%)	10(13.33%)	75	2.65
managerial practices	10(13.33%)	15(20%)	25(33.3%)	25(33.3%)	75	2.84
customer satisfaction	25(33.3%)	33(44%)	10(13.33%)	7 (9.33)	75	2.73
GRAND MEAN						**2.72**

In table 2 it was observed that purchase increase got 40%VE, 26.67%E and 6.67% U and 26.67% I it therefore implies process production influences customer retention. Response of reliability is 40% VE and 33.3% E while 20% U and 6.67% I; it therefore means that reliability influences customer retention. Quality assurance is 33.3% VE and E, which means it has influence on customer retention since 20% U and 13.33% I. Managerial practices was 13.3% VE and 20% E while 33.3% U and I. Finally, on customer satisfaction response is 33.3% VE and 44% E which is

majority and 13.33% U and 9.33% I which is minority. The grand mean value is 2.72 which is above the decision rule mean value of 2.5 it implies that process production influences customer retention.

Table3. Research Question 3 and Items. What is the relationship between mass production and customer collaboration?

Items	VE	E	U	I	Total	MEAN
effective assembly production	30(40%)	25(33.3%)	15(20%)	5(6.67)	75	2.61
marketing techniques	25(33.3%)	25(33.3%)	15(20%)	5(6.67)	75	2.83
customer service	30(40%)	20(26.67%)	5(6.67%)	20(26.67)	75	2.39
mass customization	10(13.33%)	15(20%)	25(33.3%)	25(33.3%)	75	2.63
managerial practices	25(33.3%)	28(37.3%)	15(20%)	7 (9.33)	75	2.8
GRAND MEAN						**2.65**

In table 3 it was observed that if effective assembly production and customer collaboration was 40%VE and 33.3% E and 20% U and 6.67% I; it therefore implies there is relationship between mass production and customer collaboration. Response of marketing techniques 33.3% VE and E, 20% U and 6.67% I, while 40% VE and 26.67%E for customer service, it therefore means that there is relationship between mass production and customer collaboration. Mass customization 13.33% VE and 20% E that means there is no much relationship between mass customization and customer collaboration. Finally, there is a relationship between mass production and customer collaboration since 33.3% VE and 37.3% E response for managerial practices

DISCUSSION OF RESULT

The study develops the frontiers of survey as analysis of continuous production and competitive advantage in selected aluminum companies in south- south, Nigeria to elicit responses using the structural designed questionnaire that was administered to respondents through Google form. It was observed that the grand mean obtained from the analysis is 2.65 which indicate that there is relationship between mass production and customer collaboration since 2.65 > 2.5. This is in agreement with Portal (2017) who stated that the mass production is the production of substantial amounts of standardized products in a constant flow, including and especially on assembly productions and Goffin & New (2011) who stated that customer collaboration can be generally viewed as product support as added value, after sales service or simply service. For every service provider customer support is must to achieve customers satisfaction which also spotlighted by many researchers. Customer collaboration provides competitive advantage over other homogeneous products and services. Also, if process production has influence on customer retention, the grand mean value obtained was 2.75 which is above the decision rule mean value of 2.5 it implies that the respondents are of the opinion that process production significantly influences customer retention. This is in agreement with Rios (2007) who stated that a continuous process, however, must undergo an initial start-up phase before reaching a ‘steady state’. Hence,

a steady production process must be reached in order to retain customers and even attract new ones. In addition, there is a relationship between assembly production and customer advocacy since the grand mean obtained from the analysis is 2.65 which is above the decision rule mean value of 2.5 it implies that the respondents are of the opinion that there is a relationship between assembly production and customer advocacy. This is in agreement with Shtub, (2009) who stated that the concept of assembly production has been introduced for cost-efficient and mass productions of standardized products.

Summary

Continuous production is gaining ever-increasing attention within business organization globally because of the expanding profitability gap experienced by most companies hence; the need for business sustainability becomes paramount. In contemporary business, a competitive advantage is the ability of a company to outperform its competitors both in managerial structure, customer support base, and other areas of customer management system which is a cluster of all the systems, processes, and applications that are needed to manage customer relationships. Access to natural resources, such as high-grade ores or a low-cost power source, highly trained labor, geographic position, high entry barriers, and access to new technologies can all provide a competitive advantage and enhance continuous production. Nevertheless, Customer support is the team of people who provide help when customers have trouble with a company's products or services. In other words for competitive advantage to strive as a factors in continuous production, customer advocacy was reviewed in the course of the study as customer advocacy is the act of prioritizing the needs of customers and attempting to provide solution-based support through goods and services. Contemporary businesses that embrace a customer advocacy approach are continuously looking for new methods to help their customers and guarantee their requirements are addressed as a means of competitive advantage.

CONCLUSION

Continuous production is the process, which combines and transforms various resources used in the production/operations subsystem of the organization into value added product/services in a controlled manner as per the policies of the organization. Therefore, it is that part of an organization, which is concerned with the transformation of a range of inputs into the required (products/services) having the requisite quality level. The set of interrelated management activities, which are involved in manufacturing certain products, is called as production management. If the same concept is extended to services management, then the corresponding set of management activities is called as operations management. Continuous production refers to operations and control of industrial processes in order to certify that there is smooth movement to the necessary level. It is applicable in a number of fields. Financial management and manufacturing operations are some of the two processes where you can apply production management theory. Competitive advantage is the leverage a business has over its competitors. This can be gained by offering clients better and greater value

Recommendation

Based on the findings and the survey carried out in this study, the following recommendations are made;

- In the production process of aluminium, companies should employ more flexibility in order to get customers to collaborate.
- Aluminium production companies should put more effort in satisfying customers and becoming more reliable which are great factors in the process of production, to retain their customers.
- During the process of mass production, it is recommended that aluminium, companies should effectively assemble products in stock, since it has a great influence on costumer advocacy

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