

## **Customer Targeting and Product Positioning: A Study of Small-Scale Enterprises in Nigeria**

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**ABSTRACT:** *This study examined the connection between product positioning and customer targeting strategies amongst small scale food, beverage, and fabric manufacturing companies in Nigeria. The research design used in the study was descriptive survey. Data were collected via questionnaires from 211 marketing professionals and clients of the aforementioned manufacturing entrepreneurs. The Pearson Product Moment Correlation Analysis was used as an inferential tool for data analysis. The study's findings demonstrated the importance of product positioning strategy in determining sales results and enhancing competitive advantage. It was discovered to have excellent sales prediction capabilities. In addition, the sales of manufacturing SMEs in under review were significantly impacted by product positioning tactics. As a result, this study recommends using a product price positioning strategy to increase the marketability of their items.*

**KEYWORDS:** product positioning, customer targeting, manufacturing SMEs, value/quality positioning; concentrated market targeting

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### **INTRODUCTION**

Today's increasingly competitive market requires that small and medium-sized businesses (SMEs) particularly those in manufacturing must properly position themselves and their products for optimal performance (Sullivan *et al.*, 2012). Peterson and Krishnan (2012) assert that carefully considered product positioning can provide business owners a competitive edge. Customers are drawn to high-quality items and unique market offerings, thus using the proper positioning strategy can increase sales, improve a company's performance, and reduce direct rivalry (Dirisu *et al.*, 2013). Increased sales will result from improved company and product image due to effective product positioning (Chelumbrun, 2014).

Intentional product positioning, according to Walsh and Whelan (2012), provides a company with a significant competitive advantage, increased and maintained client loyalty, and improved sales metrics. This is accomplished through product positioning, which helps consumers or buyers form an image of a product or items in their thoughts. It raises customers' awareness of the product. It also entails evaluating the market and the strength of the competition critically, positioning a new product alongside existing ones, and advertising the new product. A positioning strategy is necessary for a product to succeed in order to set it apart from competitors, meet important client buying criteria, and comprehend core product qualities. Product positioning offers small businesses the chance to influence consumer perceptions favourably and raise the competitiveness of their offerings. According to Hickey (2017), a strong product positioning strategy spurs important change and sets the product apart from rivals.

Price is one of the tactics for good product positioning. Begum and Sarala (2016) indicate that because price positioning has the capacity to either increase or decrease a company's sales, it is a successful method for product positioning in the market. Similarly, Shivashankar and Uma (2017) discussed why price positioning matters in the market sector in their argument, being the most significant economic factor influencing consumer purchasing choices. They emphasized that consumers are price sensitive and that's how businesses position their items in relation to pricing, will impact consumer approval of the products.

A product's target market is determined by the market targeting choice. The decision to target a certain market lets a company know who or what in each product market it should direct its positioning strategy at. Choosing viable market goals is one of management's most difficult tasks. Should the company, for instance, try to serve everyone who is willing and able to purchase a certain commodity or service, or should it instead deliberately target one or more subgroups? To make this choice, it is required to conduct research about the product market, its consumers, the organization's competencies and resources, and the nature of the competitors.

The steps in a targeting and positioning strategy include (I) segmenting and evaluating a product market to identify the segments, (II) choosing which segments to target, and (III) creating and implementing a positioning strategy for each target. Since consumers' needs are increasingly distinct, many businesses adopt some type of market segmentation. With the use of efficient segmentation and targeting strategies like database marketing and mass customization, micro-segmentation (finer segmentation) is rising in popularity. The opportunity for direct access to particular customs is provided by the Internet. Market segment concentration is strongly tied to product positioning. Product positioning entails developing an exclusive, recognizable, and consistent customer perception of a company's offering and image. Depending on the attitude or benefit, use or application, user, class, price, or level of quality, a product or service may be positioned. It targets a product for particular market niches and product requirements at particular costs.

### **Research Objectives**

- To examine the relationship between product positioning strategy and patronage amongst manufacturing SMEs in Rivers State, Nigeria
- To assess the association between customer targeting strategy sales in amongst manufacturing SMEs in Rivers State, Nigeria.

## CONCEPTUAL AND EMPIRICAL LITERATURE

### Product Positioning Strategies

Customers rely on a unique portrayal of a product brand known as a successful product positioning when making decisions. In the end, this results in increased consumer interest in product promotions, improved customer interest in product promotions, protection of customers from competitors, and willingness to always look for and use the product. According to research, when a household product occupies a unique position in consumers' minds, that may be challenging for rivals to capture, and this position could only be maintained by carefully crafted strategies centered on product, price, place, and promotion. However, business owners and organizations need to be aware of the criteria that consumers use to evaluate products in order to position a product in their minds.

One of the most important factors that buyers consider is a product's price. Karmau and Wafula (2015) assert that consumers are acutely aware of product prices. They want to get a high-quality item at a reasonable cost. Companies use two approaches to determine their pricing positioning strategies, each of which is based on the product's quality (Shivashankar and Uma, 2017). They adopt high prices to profit from the widely held belief that a product's quality increases with its price. Price-quality positioning is what it is called, and some businesses use it to market their goods by charging a premium price in order to convey the idea that they are of higher quality (Hartmann *et al.*, 2002). Begum and Sarala (2016) made the case that a company's price should accurately reflect where its product stands in the market. According to Rao (2010), a well-known product that holds a prominent position in the market for value and dependability may command a higher price due to the assumption that the client will pay more for the perceived advantages of utilizing the product. Additionally, businesses can agree to upgrade themselves as a low-cost product of a specific product with high quality by providing high-quality goods at low prices. This enables the company to enter a market that was previously inaccessible and gain a competitive edge (Janiszewska and Insch, 2012). Consumers that care about pricing will buy products that provide reduced prices without sacrificing quality (Blankson, 2008).

### Attribute/Benefit Positioning

In this most prevalent positioning, the product is linked to a feature that improves the welfare of the customer (Aaker 2012), with a focus on a specific quality or benefit. The tactic, also known as distinctive feature placement, can be used when a product offers something that is difficult for rivals to match (Frazer 1983). Therefore, using distinctive feature positioning for high-tech items where the impact of the innovation and competitive advantage lasts longer is more successful. It is stated that a new feature offers more value when the product's existing features are comparably subpar and seen as being of low quality (Nowlis and Simonson 1996). Products distinguish themselves based on immaterial aspects in order to stand out and be recognized as unique. Additionally, original, novel, and unusual traits improve product evaluations and aid in decision-making (Carpenter *et al.*, 1994).

### Value/Quality Positioning

While some products seek to be viewed as giving the same level of quality at lower pricing, others actually attempt to provide additional performance, reliability, extended features, and services along with the product (Batra *et al.*, 1996). Delivering quality items at reasonable

pricing is value positioning (Tay, 2003). It considers factors like being reasonably priced, providing value for the money, and being accessible to clients (Blankson and Kalafatis, 2001). This method makes an effort to assure clients that they are getting a good bargain without specifically mentioning pricing elements (Kalra and Goodstein 1998).

### **Competitive Positioning**

Placing the product in a position that is specified in relation to a rival is the most assertive component of the strategy for competitive positioning. For products with intangible or incomparable features that are challenging to evaluate on their own, competitor positioning is especially advantageous (Aaker 2012). By comparing to a market example, it enables customers to make a substantially more tangible judgement (Punj and Moon 2002). The strategy's referenced competition can come from both inside and outside the product category. Targeting within-category competitors will try to take market share away from a rival product, whereas between-category compares new usage scenarios and work to boost sales (Jewel and Barone 2007). Competition positioning approach may be used for two different reasons - Being linked with the chosen competitor is the initial goal. In order to obtain a similar strong position in the market to a strong competitor, associative positioning tactics try to appear similar to them (Droge and Darmon 1987). Secondly, is being distinctive from the competition. The products will be separated from the rivals by identifying an attribute that is better than the rival or that the rivals lack, allowing customers to choose a product over rivals if they value the attribute highly enough (Penchman and Ratneshwar, 1991)

### **Niche Positioning**

The goal of niche positioning, in contrast to most general differentiation strategies, is to create a separate submarket for the marketed product (Sujan and Bettman, 2019). Rather than highlighting a common feature connected to typical products, a quality that is unrelated to well-known brands yet significant for a certain market segment is emphasized (Penchman and Ratneshwar 2011). For niche positioning, it is essential to create an image of a specialized brand that will satisfy the needs and preferences of a small market (Porter, 1980). Due to the product's niche positioning, which distinguishes it from the competition and prevents any direct comparisons, it is seen as an effective positioning strategy. The market's efficiency and profitability are also said to be dependent on how big the market segment is that this unique positioning is aimed at, and how crucial competitive advantage is (Day *et al.*, 2019).

### **Customer Targeting Strategies**

The commercial procedure that determines which consumers to market to is called customer targeting. There is a choice to be made about who will get each direct marketing campaign, whether it be by email or direct mail (Blankson, Kalafatis, Cheng & Hadjicharalambous, 2008). The next phase in the sequential process is customer targeting, which entails a firm deciding which market segment(s) to concentrate its efforts on. Undifferentiated, concentrated, and differentiated are the three main targeting methods (Pi & Huang, 2011). Throughout this process, the company must weigh its strengths and resources against the appeal of various market sectors (Blankson, et al., 2008).

### **Undifferentiated Marketing**

Undifferentiated marketing strategy is a type of mass marketing in which advertising efforts are made to appeal to a bigger audience (Barraza, Moro, Ferreyra & de la Peña, 2019). In this case, a single message is developed to appeal to the whole audience. This tactic may be utilized for items that, in spite of distinctive distinctions, are used by several user segments. For instance, despite age and gender inequalities, commercial cars may appeal to a variety of consumer age groups. Therefore, the marketing strategy in this instance simply emphasizes discussing product qualities. The commercials were not created with a specific buyer in mind. This marketing technique is infrequently used with items for everyday usage. Undifferentiated marketing uses sophisticated messaging to successfully target clients in its own unique way (Camilleri, 2018). As a result, there is mass appeal.

### **Differentiated Marketing**

A marketing technique known as differentiated marketing concentrates on many consumer categories at once. In contrast to undifferentiated marketing, this strategy has a target market on which to build the product's marketing campaign. Therefore, the brand must specify its target market's demands in this instance. The marketing plan is then developed based on these demands. In reality, a single approach will be used to target all segments in the undifferentiated marketing plan (Barraza, et al., 2019). On the other hand, the differentiated marketing approach would employ several campaigns that are directed at various market niches. Because differentiated marketing focuses on the demands of the consumer, teams must invest resources in gathering information and input from the target market.

### **Concentrated Marketing**

A method known as concentrated marketing focuses on a narrowly defined customer demographic (Hazar, Hanlan & Sinarwati, 2014). It focuses solely on a certain customer demographic. The goal of the entire campaign is to appeal to that specific customer group. A customer segment or market segment separates a large target market into groups of customers that have similar requirements, wants, or qualities. The concentrated marketing approach can be utilized for any product that caters to a highly specific market. It works especially well for small businesses trying to break into a certain market (Inderst & Martin, 2022). They can utilize their limited resources on consumer research for only that targeted category if they employ a focused marketing approach.

### **Empirical Literature**

According to Janiszewska and Inch (2012), rational consumers are sensitive to price and gravitate toward inexpensive goods of high quality. If businesses use it, their sales will rise, and they will have a competitive advantage. Heide (2017) asserts that consumers base their purchasing decisions on price and that they will continue to favor inexpensive goods of high quality. According to Nazmul *et al.*, (2012), pricing a product to attract customers and increase sales volume and income is an effective way to position it in the market. According to Shivashankar and Uma (2017), various businesses use the pricing positioning strategy to increase sales and profitability. Price positioning, according to Hickey (2017), is a crucial strategy for accelerating the company's volume and sales growth. He emphasized that competitively priced, high-quality products that are well positioned in the market will draw

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customers and increase repeat business, volume, and income. Shivashankar and Uma (2017) conducted an empirical investigation of Bangalore apparel brand positioning and sales. With a focus on their characteristics, looks, durability, quality, benefits, price, image, and aesthetic value, they investigated three major denim brands, Wrangler, Lee, and Levi Strauss. The researchers utilized a structured questionnaire to collect information from 40 consumers about their opinions of the qualities, benefits, pricing, image, and aesthetic value of the three jean brands. They employed a descriptive research design and a descriptive research approach. On the basis of characteristics, appearance, durability, quality, advantages, price, image, and aesthetic value, consumers placed Lee brand higher, followed by Levi Strauss brand, then Wrangler, according to spearman rank correlation study. The study concluded that product positioning increases clothing sales in Bangalore.

According to Kongalla (2013), several businesses have had success utilizing pricing as a positioning technique to boost sales. He contends that these businesses create high-quality goods at somewhat lower prices than those of their rivals, which draws in more clients and increases their sales. Gibson (2013) endorsed Kongalla's assertion and concurred that the most alluring strategy utilized by start-up businesses to boost sales is price positioning. He asserts that organizations using pricing as their positioning approach to boost sales are those looking to enter a new market. Price positioning strategy, according to Mulei (2005), has the potential to increase a company's sales. Mulei and Blankson (2008) both agreed that most small-scale businesses tended to employ low-quality materials.

## **METHODOLOGY**

### **Study Population and Sample Design:**

For the study's research design, the descriptive survey approach was adopted because it made it simpler to ascertain the study subjects' viewpoints. The aim of the study was to identify and explicate the relationship between product positioning and customer targeting strategy and sales in manufacturing enterprises in Rivers State. The study's target audience comprised owners and managers as well as customers of SMEs in Rivers State involved in the manufacturing of various products. There are over 150 registered SMEs manufacturers according to the registrations accessible at the Rivers State Ministry of Commerce and Industry.

### **Sample and Sampling Techniques**

Using Krejcie and Morgan's (1970) table for finding the sample size of a given population, which was adopted by Sekaran (2003). Krejcie and Morgan's states that for a population that is projected to be up to 1,000,000 and above, the suitable sample size is 384, hence this was used to determine a total of 384 for some manufacturing SMEs in Rivers State.

### **Instrument of Data Collection**

A set of self-administered questionnaire was designed by the researcher and used for the study. It comprises two sections. Section A covered the respondents' demographics, and Section B covered the study variables. The section A having five total items and section B having 12 closed-ended, 5-point likert scale questions with ratings from one to five. The predictor variable was addressed by a total of 5 items in Section B. The research instrument was validated by senior academics. The Cronbach's Alpha test which was carried out on the pilot questionnaire resulted in a value of 0.764, which was deemed adequate based on the 0.70 threshold value proposed by Nunally, (1987).

### Data Analysis Techniques

For data presentation and analysis, a combination of descriptive and inferential statistical tools were used. SPSS version 24, a statistical tool for social sciences, and GraphPad prism were employed to aid in the analysis. The presentation of the data, was done using the descriptive statistical tool (mean and standard deviation). Pearson correlation was also used for the analysis of the relationship amongst variables.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Data Presentation and Analysis

A total of 384 copies of the survey instrument were given out to SMEs' marketing managers, owners and clients. From the 384 copies that were administered, 211 were returned and used for statistical analysis. This yielded 63.5% questionnaire response rate, which was considered representative enough considering the usual low response rate for studies in a less developed country like Nigeria.

### Demographic Profile of Respondents

According to the profile of respondents, 10 (11.3%) of the respondents said their companies had been in the business for less than a year, 17 (19.1%) said they had been in business for between one and three years, 40 (44.9%) said they had been in business for between four and six years, and 22 (24.7%) said they had been in business for more than six years. Additionally, 30 (12.1%) of the respondents were employees, while 27 (11%) were managers, 89 (35.9%) were business owners and 102 (41.1%) customers. On the other hand, responses from customers revealed that they have patronized & used the product for the following periods of time: 10 (9.4%) for <1yr, 21 (19.8%) between 1 and 5 years, 30 (28.3%) between 6 and 10 years, and 45 (42.6%) between 10 and above. Lastly, 22 (24.7%) said the business environment has been fair, 17 (19.1%) excellent, 40 (44.9%) not favourable and 10 (11.3%) reported to be indifferent.

### Descriptive Results

**Table 1 – Descriptive analysis of product positioning**

Items	Mean	SD	Minimum	Maximum
Characteristics-based positioning	4.23	1.90	0.78	4.58
Pricing-based positioning	3.16	1.81	0.50	4.12
Use or application-based positioning	3.21	1.75	1.03	4.53
Quality or prestige-based positioning	4.18	1.58	1.27	4.43
Competitor-based positioning	2.76	1.65	0.68	3.98

The total mean response demonstrates that the product consumers pay for the small businesses (SMEs) that make food, beverages and fabrics is reasonably good, suggesting that product

pricing can forecast sales of the products. Results showed that characteristics-based positioning has the highest mean score ( $\mu = 4.23$ ,  $SD = .729$ ). This reveals that the majority of the small scale manufacturing firms adopt characteristics-based positioning. This was followed by quality or prestige-based positioning ( $\mu = 4.18$ ,  $SD = .800$ ). Then by use or application-based positioning ( $\mu = 3.21$ ,  $SD = .956$ ). Pricing-based positioning came fourth ( $\mu = 3.16$ ,  $SD = .911$ ). The last practice was competitor-based positioning with ( $\mu = 2.76$ ,  $SD = 1.098$ ). The result finds common ground with the work of Inderst and Martin (2022) and Bashir and Younis (2022), who also found out that characteristics-based positioning is the most widely adopted product positioning practice.

**Table 2 : Customer Targeting Practices**

S/N	Customer Targeting Practices	Mean	St. Dev.
1	Undifferentiated Marketing	4.36	.749
2	Differentiated Marketing	4.22	.790
3	Concentrated Marketing	3.56	.884

Table 2 shows the responses from the respondents on the customer targeting strategies adopted by their firms. Results showed that undifferentiated marketing has the highest mean score ( $\mu = 4.36$ ,  $SD = .749$ ). Implying that most of the small scale manufacturing firms adopt an undifferentiated marketing strategy. This was followed by differentiated marketing ( $\mu = 4.22$ ,  $SD = .790$ ). The last customer targeting strategy was concentrated marketing with ( $\mu = 3.56$ ,  $SD = .884$ ). This result shows that most small scale manufacturing firms adopt mass marketing in which advertising efforts are made to appeal to a bigger audience which is consonance with the submissions of Blankson, et al. (2008), Pi and Huang (2011), and Barraza, et al. (2019) who found that mass marketing helps small scale enterprises to survive and be competitive.

## DISCUSSION

The results from the statistical analysis indicated majorly good outcome of product positioning and targeting leading to competitive advantage for SMEs in Rivers State. This shows that the respondents generally agreed on the following points: the company they buy from typically sets competitive prices for each of its goods and services; cost-cutting drives all aspects of production and has an impact on product prices; it provides discounts to deserving customers; and it considers the socioeconomic status of its target market when setting prices for its products as well as taking the business location and environment into consideration. Heide (2017), Begum and Sarala (2016), and other researchers who have claimed that firms use product price positioning as a tactic to boost sales, concur with this finding. According to this study, SMEs in Rivers State working in the food, beverage and fabric production sector will see an increase in sales if they use a product pricing positioning strategy. This result is supported by the findings of Mulei (2005), Blankson (2008), and Ndinda (2005), who found that brand price positioning is a successful strategy for increasing a company's sales and setting competitive advantage. This suggests that consumers are price sensitive and that a business will see a boost in sales if it positions its product based on price. Consumers will always choose the high-quality products with the lowest pricing on the market. Managers of manufacturing



SMEs need to carefully strategize on how to use pricing to position their products for maximum sales, which will give them the edge on their rivals and increase company fortunes.

## CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

The study's findings demonstrated that product positioning can raise sales. Therefore, businesses who adopt product positioning strategies and work to position the products they offer in terms of pricing have a better chance of increasing sales in the shortest amount of time. Consumers are price sensitive, therefore if a business promotes its product on pricing (i.e., as the cheapest supplier of specific brands without sacrificing those products' quality), it will see a measurable rise in sales as well as an advantage competitively. This study suggests that manufacturing business owners work to keep product costs reasonable as customers will always stick with high-quality product whose prices are competitively priced.

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