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MANAGERIAL ROLES AND COMPETITIVE ADVANTAGE: SMES, PERSPECTIVE FROM LAGOS STATE NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT: *The operation of small and medium sized enterprises (SMEs) has awakened the interest of experts globally due to the varied challenges from low market share, poor sales growth, and dwindling profit. These have made them less competitive, market/product failure, and sub-optimal performance, and at times closures. Hence, this study investigated the effect of managerial roles on competitive advantage of SMEs in Lagos State Nigeria. Cross sectional survey research design was adopted using structured questionnaire. The target population comprised 460 owner- managers of the selected SMEs in manufacturing, real estate, agricultural and services sector in the five main divisions of the State (Ikeja, Badagry, Ikorodu, Lagos Island, Epe). Mixed method sampling technique was used. Pilot study was carried out to establish the validity and reliability of the research instrument. Cronbach's Alpha coefficients for the constructs ranged from 0.790 and 0.946. Data were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics. Statistically and significant relationship was established between managerial roles and competitive advantage with adjusted* R^2 *0.61,* $F_{\text{-stat }(4,450)}=183.13$*,* $p<0.05$*. In addition, marketing (*$\beta = 0.529$*,* $t = 8.523$*,* $p<0.05$*), people management (*$\beta = 0.610$*,* $t = 13.055$*,* $p<0.05$*) significant affected competitive advantage while communication and negotiation exhibited insignificant effect on competitive advantage of SMEs in Lagos State. This study recommended that SMEs should actively invest in marketing and human resources to ensure competitive advantage.*

KEYWORDS: Managerial roles, competitive advantage, SMEs, marketing, people management

INTRODUCTION

Globally, the performance of small and medium sized enterprises (SMEs) has aroused the interest of key experts such as Economists, Entrepreneurs, Governments, Venture capital firms, financial institutions and Non-governmental organizations. Nevertheless, SMEs over time have experienced poor performance ranging from low market share, poor sales growth to weak profitability which, have caused them to fair below expectation. These hiccups have resulted into closure, especially in the developing countries. Owing to various contextual and internal constraint, it has been discovered that SMEs both in developed and developing countries are faced with these challenges but in various degrees. Scholars have acknowledged that managerial roles essentially play significant role in firms' strategy decision making (Corbetta & Salvato 2004) and can contribute to a firm's entrepreneurship (Miller & Le Breton-Miller 2006).

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However, little is known about how managerial roles explain performance of SMEs (Bammens et al., 2011), especially competitive advantage.

Managerial roles effect on SMEs have been carefully and keenly considered by some researchers with reference to how the skills needed to set up a business differs from those needed to run a business (Eniola, 2014). Eniola and Entebang (2015) in their research suggested that the gaps should be filled. Akinso (2018) articulated on successful strategies but stated specific business problem of SMEs along owners' lacking skills and strategies to manage start-up stage. Eniola and Ektebang (2014) attributed the perquisite power to managerial skills development and technological innovation, but are regrettably insufficient among SMEs in Nigeria. Jaouen and Lasch (2015) posited that lack of managerial skills and continuous skills development are key players which have rendered SMEs less competitive as compared to their counterparts in other African countries.

Yusuf and Dansu (2013) noted that SMEs in Lagos State are weak and are faced with a lot of competition from their larger counterparts. These put them in poor strategic positions because they lack the wherewithal needed to withstand such competition like qualified and skilled workforce, adequate professionalism, limited capital and other resources among others. The observed weaknesses expose them to serious strategic risks which limit their chance of survival. Idemobi (2012) and Oduyoye, Adebola, and Binuyo (2013) reported that over 70% of SMEs die within five years of establishment and Eniola (2014) further asserted same trend in Nigeria. Furthermore, Akinso (2018) noted that the risks and challenges that small business owners often face in Nigeria include financial and non-financial constraints and have jeopardized the survival and competitive advantage of small businesses.

Scholars have identified constraints which include managerial skills, managerial roles, corruption, increase in the interest rate, and poor infrastructure (Ariyo, 2005; Sagagi 2006; Olawoye, 2016; Owoseni & Adeyeye, 2017). While skills inadequacy is endemic, the managerial roles nexus to SMEs competitive advantages, and eventually failure of SMEs (Abdul, 2018) is less investigated. Given SMEs' high failure rate and the need to identify strategies to improve their performance this study seeks to evaluate the effect of managerial roles on competitive advantage of SMEs in Lagos State Nigeria. The paper is structured as introduction, literature review, methodology, presentation of results, conclusion and recommendation.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Managerial skills are set of qualities and attributes in a personality of the managers that enable them to effectively manage the working of the organization Kamble et al (2011). Managerial skills also can be defined as specialised technical knowledge in certain jobs that managers should possess to perform their duties and roles by education where by people can be equipped with skills Lakshman et al (2017). Managerial skills are acquiring and learning abilities. In other words, we can say that managerial skills are a set of behaviours that lead to effective job performance and without them in many cases the knowledge of managers do not have any

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effects. Katz (2002) defined managerial skills as the managers' ability to transform information and knowledge into practice. The efficiency in the performance of management is reflected in their behavior, as they integrally apply their skills, personality traits and acquired knowledge Levy–Leboyer (2003). In addition to the knowledge, skills, roles and capabilities, the manager of today must possess practical knowledge in economic, financial, commercial, legal, marketing, and human management topics, and master two or more languages that will make possible to develop essential skills to achieve competitive results: excellent interrelations with their collaborators, suppliers, clients, and every person that intervenes in the value chain Zahra et al (2007).

Furthermore, management skills are linked to symbolic factors such as communication skills, adaptive capacity, receptivity to external environments, strong technical abilities, stress management, ability to work well with others, social intelligence, and appreciation for cultural diversity and teamwork, so that they can positively contribute to a management that is focused on corporate competitiveness (Barhem et al., 2011; Samujh, & El-Kafafi, 2010; & Tonidandel et al., 2012). Choi and Williams (2016) indicated that, for an SME to be performance competent, its management should exhibit good knowledge of the industry, in terms of how to position the SME within the industry. This is management ability to mobilise start-up capital, satisfy customers and network with suppliers and competitors. In retrospect to this scenario SME owner/managers being the driving force of the firm should seek necessary techniques, strategies and skills that enable the firm to achieve a competitive edge over their rivalry firms. Therefore, managerial roles are a combination of the manager's professional knowledge, acquired skills, experience, traits and the proper attitude and motivation to act on-the-job (Szczepańska-Woszczyna, 2014).

Communication

Communication as discussed by Athar, Rida and Shah (2015) is the lifeblood of every organization. Communication is the specific process through which vital information moves and is exchanged throughout an organization. Information flows through both formal and informal structures and it flows downward, upward, and laterally (Schermerhorn et al., 2002). Today, more than ever before, communication plays a vital role in how managers get important things done in timely, and high quality ways. If communication can be done effectively, challenges can be overcome (Durham et al., 2005). Notwithstanding the size of the firm, communication is paramount to effectiveness of any organization.

Marketing

Vassinen (2006) view marketing as deeply customer-oriented concept focusing on the top management's long-term vision for competitive advantage through product innovation, other functions being fully subservient to this process. While customers are at the core of all thinking, innovation orientation must stem from the organization. Gupta, & Dutta, (2018) define market orientation as "organization-wide generation of market intelligence pertaining to current and future customer needs, dissemination of the intelligence across departments, and organization-

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wide responsiveness to it. Marketing is a crucial activity for the survival and success of a business. Businesses today have more marketing opportunities than ever (Bresciani & Eppler, 2010). Literally, in small businesses, marketing relies heavily on word of mouth recommendations for customer acquisition (Stokes & Lomax).

Negotiation

Roloff, Putnam and Anastasiou (2003) defined negotiation as a process of interaction. Nevertheless, Weingart and Olekalns (2004) point out that the negotiation process has not been prioritized in the negotiation research. It is notable that researchers' individual perspectives and contexts of negotiation research shape their definitions accordingly. The most critical elements in achieving negotiation objectives that a negotiator must attend, before actually sitting down to negotiate, are effective planning and preparation. In order to plan effectively, a negotiator must be able to anticipate the major events that will occur during negotiation and prepare in advance for them.

People Management

People management refers to a combination of a set or bundle of managerial practices or systems that firms adopt to handle the organization's most important asset- people, to attain, maintain and sustain inimitable competitive advantage to achieve superior performance (Sagwa, K'Obonyo & Ogutu, 2015). An organization can adopt a set of people management strategies that suit its operational requirements. Chigozie, Aga, and Onyia, (2018) defined people management as the stock of competences, knowledge and personality attributes embodied in the ability to perform labour so as to produce economic value. A firm's growth is positively related to the quality of human capital and the firm's investment in it (Gossling & Rutten, 2007; Santos-Rodrigues et al., 2010). People management has been recognized as one of managerial tools that can improve SMEs performance (Franssila, Okkonen, Savolainen, & Talja, 2012; Ganotakis, 2010; Oforegbunam & Okorafor, 2010; Ofoegbu et al., 2013; & McIver, Lengnick-Hall, Lengnick-Hall, & Ramachandran, 2013).

Competitive advantage

In the perspective of Moulling, 2009, performance has been defined in terms of how well an organization is managed, and the value the organization delivers to customer and other stakeholders. Competitive advantage is considered as the comparative measure between companies within an industry or its external environment (Sascha, Burtscher, Vallaster, & Angerer, 2018). Wang, Lin & Chu, 2011 posited that a competitive advantage exists when the firm is able to render the same benefits as competitors but at a lower cost (cost advantage), or deliver benefits that surpass those of competing products (differentiation advantage). Miles and Darroch (2006) classified three canons of competitive advantage: The organization's resources (Barney, 1991); the organization's ability to identify an advantageous opportunity and establish a superior market position; the firm's decision rules and processes that drive the pursuit of

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opportunities (Eisenhardt & Sull, 2001).Competitive advantage is simply as the ability of an organisation to stay ahead of present or potential competition. It is the superior performance or performance edge of an organization in form of market leadership. According to Ardianus and Petrus (2016), competitive advantage is anything that can be done better by the firm when compared to the competitors. Christensen (2010) defined competitive advantage is whatever value a business provides that motivates its customers (or end users) to purchase its products or services rather than those of its competitors and that poses impediments to imitation by actual or potential direct competitors. David (2011) posited that competitive advantage can be achieved through continually adapt to changing trends and external activities, skills, and internal resources; and effectively formulate, implement, and evaluate various strategies which reinforce those factors.

Managerial Roles and Competitive Advantage

According to empirical studies, managerial role has positive impacts on the organizational performance and also enhances competitive advantages (Castrogiovanni, Urbano & Loras, 2011; Paauwe, Guest & Wright, 2013; Özdemirci, 2011). Özdemirci (2011) stated that in order to enhance a company´s financial performance and competitive advantage, managers should consider entrepreneurial orientation activities seriously. As these activities may take years to fully pay off, it is crucial that managers adopt a long-term perspective in developing, managing, and evaluating entrepreneurial orientation (Paauwe, Guest & Wright, 2013). In the empirical study of Ejdys (2016) the positive impact on companies' performance and competitive advantage is that entrepreneurial orientation activities improve the overall organizational learning and drive the wide range of knowledge creation, which sets the foundation of new organizational competencies. Hence, entrepreneurial orientation demands that an organization constantly acquires and develops resources, which can be a source of sustainable competitive advantage when they are rare, have value, and provide barriers to duplicate (Mukutu, 2017; Paauwe, Guest & Wright, 2013). These resources include physical, organizational, and human dimensions (Steffens et al., 2015). One major source of a sustained competitive advantage is a firms´ human capital (Özdemirci, 2011).

Similarly, Cano, Francois, Carrillat, and Fernando (2004) affirmed that managerial role significantly determined firm competitive advantage and also market innovation has a significant role in meeting market needs and response to market opportunities. The significance of entrepreneurial orientation to market share, although limited, is presented in the literature also Juho-Petteri, Antti, Frösén, and Jaakkola (2014) revealed that entrepreneurial orientation components determine market share, market competition and innovation and also had a positive impact on the sales growth of organisations. Supporting past empirical findings, AbdulQadir and Aljanabi, (2018) also established a strong, positive and significant link between entrepreneurial orientation components, managerial role and firm performance. Owoseni and Adeyeye (2012) examined the effect of entrepreneurial orientation indicators such as innovativeness, risk-taking and pro-activeness on sales performance. Their study employed survey research design and regression method of analysis in a study of 310 SME's in Nigeria. They revealed that

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innovativeness, risk-taking and pro-activeness jointly and independently predicted organizational sales growth and performance. Also, Petzer (2012) conducted a study on the role of entrepreneurial orientation in firm sales performance in South Africa. Their study employed survey research design and regression method of analysis. The study revealed that South African regulatory environment inhibits the adoption of entrepreneurial orientation by financial institutions in South Africa. As has also empirically done by Otieno (2013) who examined the effect of entrepreneurial orientation on competitive advantage and sales performance among manufacturing firms in Kenya. The study established that entrepreneurial orientation adoption improved sales, profits and employment. All these findings are supported by the findings Olawoye (2016). Their study was on the role of entrepreneurial orientation on firm sales performance in Nigeria and it revealed that high performing entrepreneurial-oriented firms were those firms, which were quick in recognizing and exploiting business opportunities and achieved targeted market competitive advantage.

METHODOLOGICAL REVIEW

This paper employed survey research design to examine the interaction of entrepreneurial managerial roles and SME performance in Lagos State, Nigeria using a population size of four thousand, five hundred and thirty-five (4,535) owner/managers of SMEs operating in Lagos State and registered with small and medium enterprises development agency of Nigeria (SMEDAN) as it was in the record of Corporate Affairs Commission (CAC) Nigeria as at 2014. The sample size of 364 was used for the study determined by using Cochran formula. Cochran (1997) postulated that, the continuous component of sample size formula is the estimation of variance in the primary variables of interest in the study. A proportionality (P) value was taken to be 0.5 and risk factor α was taken to be 5% (0.05).

The sample size was 354 from the population of 4535. The survey research design was cross sectional in nature and the adoption of this design was influenced by the research problem and its corresponding research questions. The choice of survey research design was further considered appropriate because according to Zikmund, Babin, Carr and Griffin, (2012), it attempts to understand a particular population at a particular time and to ensure that the amount of uncertainty characterizing decision situation is clearly defined. Also it allowed the researcher to explain the association between the dependent and independent variables quantitatively. This design was used based on the work of Asikhia (2010) and Makinde (2015) and also consistent with the study of Adisa, Adeoye & Okunbanjo (2016); Allen (2011); Egwakhe (2014); Egwakhe and Kabasha (2016); Lee (2010), which engender detailed and reliable explanations of the relationship among variables. This paper employed multistage method sampling technique because SMEs are scattered across the five divisions/geo-political zones of Lagos State. The first stage was by stratification based on the location of the SMEs (Ikeja, Badagry, Ikorodu, Lagos [Eko] & Epe). The rationale for choosing the five divisions as representative of the whole Lagos State was that it covered the key commercially prominent areas as supported by the record from SMEDAN stated by Makinde (2015).

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The second stage was proportionate sampling method which was used to allot the value of samples to each stratum (division). Lastly, simple random sampling method was then used to get the final respondent for the study. Before administration of the questionnaire to the respondents, a pilot test with a small group of respondents was carried out in order to ascertain the suitability and applicability of the designed questionnaire. The pilot study was conducted to ensure consistency and relevance of the research instrument. Pre-test was carried out on forty-six (46) randomly selected owners/managers of SMEs in Ogun State representing 10% of the total sample size according to Connelly (2008). The list and names of the selected SMEs are in the appendix. These SMEs were not part of the sample businesses for the main study. Out of the forty six sampled owners/managers of SMEs for the pilot study, forty-three (43) copies representing 93.4% of the questionnaires were returned, filled accordingly and usable.

Model Specification

$Y = f(X)$
$X = (x_a, x_b, x_c, x_d)$

$Y = \beta_{0\,+}\ \beta_1 x_a + \beta_2 x_b + \beta_3 x_c + \beta_4 x_d + e_i$................................ (1)
Where:
Y= Competitive advantage (CA)
X= Managerial roles (MR
X_a= communication (CO)
X_b= marketing (MA)
X_c= negotiation (NE)
X_d= people management (PM)

Collection of data was done by using primary source through administration of structured questionnaire. The quantitative data collected through the copies of the questionnaire were analysed using descriptive and inferential statistics. Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) 20.0 was used to analyse the copies of the questionnaire and to test the hypotheses. The ethical aspect of any research work was adhered to in order to prevent manipulation, falsification, and undue stress on the respondents.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

To assess the the effect of managerial roles on competitive advantage, 460 copies of questionnaire were administered on owners/managers of SMEs in Lagos State and 457 copies were duly filled, retrieved and found useful. This represents a response rate of about ninety-nine percent, which was adjudged to be scientifically suitable. Table 1 presents the results of the analysis with the adjusted R^2 0.615 ($F_{(4,452)}$ = 183.136, p< 0.05) indicated that managerial roles components only explained 61.5% of the changes in competitive advantage of the SMEs in Lagos State. In addition, the model met fitness and robustness criteria for the analysis. Table 1 presents the multiple regression analysis results for the influence of managerial roles

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(communication, marketing, negotiation and people management) on competitive advantage of SMEs in Lagos State, Nigeria. The results revealed that marketing (β = 0.529, t = 8.523, p<0.05) has a positive and significant effect on competitive advantage. On the other hand people management had a positive significant effect (β = 0.610, t = 13.055, p<0.05) on competitive advantage of SMEs in Lagos State. Further, the results revealed that communication and negotiation had negative and insignificant effect on competitive advantage of SMEs in Lagos State, Nigeria.

Table 1: Effect of Managerial roles on Competitive Advantage of SMEs in Lagos State

N	**Model**	**B**	**Sig.**	**T**	**ANOVA (Sig.)**	**R**	**Adjusted R^2**	**F (df)**
457	Constant	-0.496	0.004	-2.916	0.000^b	0.786	0.615	183.136 (4,452)
	Communication	-0.136	0.064	-1.855				
	Marketing	0.529	0.000	8.523				
	Negotiation	0.044	0.276	1.091				
	People Management	0.610	0.000	13.055				
	Predictors: (Constant), People Management, Marketing, Negotiation, Communication							
	Dependent Variable: Competitive Advantage							

Source: Field Survey, 2019

The regression model shows that holding managerial roles to a zero, competitive advantage would be -0.496 implying that without managerial roles, sales growth of the SMEs in Lagos State, Nigeria would be negative which implies a deficit. The results of the multiple regression analysis indicate that when marketing, negotiation and people management are improved by one-unit competitive advantage will be positively affected with an increase of 0.529, 0.044 and 0.610 respectively while a unit improvement in communication will reduce the profit by 0.136. The result shows an overall statistical significance with p<0.05 which implies that managerial roles components are important determinants of competitive advantage of selected SMEs in Lagos State, Nigeria. This implies that managers should pay pertinent attention to marketing and people management to achieve competitive advantage at the SMEs in Lagos State, Nigeria.

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DISCUSSION

This paper investigated the effect of managerial roles on competitive advantage of SMEs in Lagos State Nigeria, multiple regression was used. The findings revealed marketing ($\beta = 0.529$, $t = 8.523$, $p<0.05$) has significant effect on competitive advantage. Further, results of the multiple regression showed that people management ($\beta = 0.610$, $t = 13.055$, $p<0.05$) has significant effect on competitive advantage, while communication ($\beta = -0.136$, $t = -1.855$, $p<0.05$) and negotiation ($\beta = 0.044$, $t = 1.091$, $p<0.05$) have negative and insignificant effect on competitive advantage of SMEs in Lagos State.

In support of the findings is Wan-Jing and Tung (2005) who opined that there are seven people management strategies that influence competitive advantage and firm performance. These people management strategies are; employment security, targeted selection, workplace teams and decentralization, high pay contingent on organizational performance, employee training, reduction of status differentials and business information sharing with employees. Firms are increasingly enhancing their abilities towards managing their human resources more effectively for better outcomes (Boxall & Purcell, 2003).In the same vein, Vassinen (2006) view marketing as deeply customer-oriented concept focusing on the top management's long-term vision for competitive advantage through product innovation, other functions being fully subservient to this process. While customers are at the core of all thinking, innovation orientation must stem from the organization.

Supporting the findings of this paper, the RBV pays attention to the role of resources and skills of the firm in determining the boundaries of the firm's activities, and in forming the foundation of the firm's long-term strategy. It is also concerned with how these resources and skills constitute the primary source of profits and performance for the firm (Grant, 2001). Humans (employees) are the most important resource of an organization if well managed leads to competitive advantage for the firm. Employees comprise of different embodiment of skills and abilities if well combined can become extremely productive and a source of advantage for the firm especially small businesses who do not have a large pool of employees.

The findings also corroborated several authors such as Castrogiovanni, Urbano and Loras (2011), Paauwe, Guest and Wright (2013) and Özdemirci (2011) who found that managerial roles have positive impacts on the organizational performance and also enhances competitive advantages. Özdemirci (2011) states that in order to enhance a company´s financial performance and competitive advantage, managers should consider entrepreneurial orientation activities seriously. As these activities may take years to fully pay off, it is crucial that managers adopt a long-term perspective in developing, managing, and evaluating entrepreneurial orientation (Paauwe, Guest & Wright, 2013). Supporting the findings of this study, AbdulQadir and Aljanabi, (2018) also established a positive and significant influence of managerial roles and firm competitive

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advantage. Similarly, Cano, Francois, Carrillat, and Fernando (2004) affirmed that managerial role significantly determined firm competitive advantage and also market innovation has a significant role in meeting market needs and response to market opportunities. Also, Otieno (2013) established that managerial roles are important in improving sales, profits and employment which are an important source of competitive advantage of a firm. Based on the findings of this study and empirical evidence from past studies, it can be concluded that managerial roles, in particular, marketing and people management have a significant influence on competitive advantage of SMEs in Lagos State, Nigeria.

CONCLUSION

This paper concluded that managerial roles, specifically marketing and people management have a significant effect on competitive advantage a means of assessing the performance of SMEs in Lagos State. In addition, the study also concluded that effective communication skills, marketing skills, negotiation skills and people management skills are highly significant ingredients that owner managers should have in order to stay competitive in the industry as well as gain competitive advantage. Also, as the study has made evident that marketing and people management have significant effect on competitive advantage, this will inform entrepreneurs to invest in marketing and would also stir entrepreneurs to look inwards and find ways of improving their managerial competencies so as to achieve competitive advantage gearing towards having an overall influence on their performance. Based on the evidence of the findings, the study recommends that SMEs should actively invest in marketing in order to gain competitive advantage. Also, the study recommends that owners/managers of SMEs should possess effective negotiation skills to know how to handle their customers in terms of demand, pricing and after sale services, this interaction is key in order to increase their market share and also to increase customer loyalty. Further, this study recommends that effective communication is the key to winning both employees and customers of any SMEs in a bid to increasing market share.

As such, further research should be carried out in other geopolitical zones and in Nigeria and other developing countries across the globe as this would help in comparability and generalizability of empirical findings. Further studies should also consider using interview as against the questionnaire that this paper used. The study was limited to the SME sector, there should be further studies carried out directed to other sectors.

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