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Corporate Social Responsibility and Competitive Advantage in Nigerian Telecommunication Industry: A Study of MTN Nigeria

Emmanuel Lubem Asenge[1*], Christopher Iornenge[2], Innocent Immoneghame Agbanu[3], Adudu Chiangi Adudu[4]

[1]Ph.D, Department of Business Management, Faculty of Management Sciences, Benue State University, Makurdi-Nigeria.*
[2]Department of Business Management, Faculty of Management Sciences, Benue State University, Makurdi-Nigeria.*
[3]Department of Business Management, Faculty of Management Sciences, Benue State University, Makurdi-Nigeria.*
[4]Department of Business Administration and Management, School of Management and Business Studies, Yaba College of Technology, Lagos-Nigeria .*

Corresponding Email: [1]easenge@gmil.com*

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***Abstract:** The study explored the effect of corporate social responsibility on competitive advantage in Nigerian telecommunication industry. The research specifically examined the effect of ethical, philanthropic, legal and economic responsibilities on competitive advantage in Nigerian telecommunication industry. A survey research design was adopted. The population of the study included of 1326 staff of MTN Nigeria and 250 staff were purposively sampled. The study utilized questionnaire as the instrument of data collection and data collected from participants were analysed using descriptive statistics and regression analysis with the aid of the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS 23). The study found that ethical responsibility has a positive and significant effect on competitive advantage. The study also found a positive and significant effect of philanthropic responsibility on competitive advantage. There is a positive and significant effect of legal and economic responsibilities on competitive advantage in Nigerian telecommunication industry. The study concludes that corporate social responsibility practices considerably sustain competeveness in Nigerian telecommunication industry. It recommends amongst others that management of telecommunication companies in Nigeria should increase their commitment to ethical responsibility activities such as community projects and environmental protection in order to enhance peaceful coexistence with people within their environment.*

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Keywords: Corporate Social Responsibility, Competitive Advantage, Philanthropic Responsibility, Ethical Responsibility, Legal Responsibility, Economic Responsibility.

1. INTRODUCTION

The contemporary and volatile business world today is characterized by an increasing intensity in competitiveness by organizations and to achieve competitive advantage, companies must think beyond profit maximization. Companies in the 21st embrace other practices, including corporate social responsibility, which helps in building competitive advantage (Madueño, Herrera, Jorge, Conesa & Martínez-Martínez, 2016). Corporate social responsibility is connected with regular activities and actions implemented by firms to improve their image and reputation. This enhances customer satisfaction, which boosts the sales and profits of enterprises, thereby enhancing competitiveness in the market (Marakova, Wolak-Tuzimek & Tuckova, 2021).

Corporate social responsibility involves a company's strategies that affect different stakeholders in the society. Companies incorporate into operations to improve their activities in relation to public demands and expectations (Salifu, 2020). It is obligatory for firms to improve discretionary business practices and the use of resources to contribute to sustainable economic development, through collaboration with employees, the local community, and the public to improve quality of life that would be beneficial for both the business and society in general (Irabora, 2019). CSR actions ensure that a firm steer away its focus on merely profit towards the concern for all stakeholders (Maráková, Lament & Wolak-Tuzimek, 2019).

The contemporary understanding of CSR can be seen as economic, legal, ethical, and discretionary expectations members of the public have regarding businesses (Carroll & Buchholtz, 2003). The economic responsibilities entail society's anticipation that companies should produce goods and services that meet customer needs and sold at considerate prices (Maráková, Lament & Wolak-Tuzimek, 2019). The legal responsibilities reflect the companies' obedience to the laws set aside by a society for business operation. The ethical responsibilities explain the anticipation by a society that companies should conduct businesses that do not affect societal well-being. The discretionary responsibilities include philanthropic support or programmes such as donations provided by a firm for the benefit of members of the public.

Companies are therefore expected to fulfil the requirements of their existence and liable for their actions that affect societies and the ecology. CSR offers organizations diverse opportunities that enable companies to differentiate their products and services from competitors, hence it is considered as a tool for strategic planning, reputation and competitive advantage (Adenike, Oyetunde & Kolapo, 2019). The engagement of firms in CSR is not only to improve the perception of stakeholders but to build trust which ultimately provides competitive advantage for business operations (Powei, 2020).

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Companies in the Nigerian telecommunication sector have also embraced corporate social responsibility for years back. The mobile telecommunication was introduced in Nigeria because of deregulation and liberalization of the economy in 2001 and the trend has witnessed the employment of many of Nigerians by Global System for Mobile Communication (GSM) as distributors, retailers of GSM phones, recharge card sellers, GSM phone repairers amongst others (Nsikan, Umoh & Bariate, 2015). The mobile telecommunication sector has contributed tremendously in promoting CSR activities, which help in sustaining the development of Nigerian economy.

1.1 Statement of the Problem

Many organizations in Nigeria have continuously emphasized the need for profit maximization while neglecting the host communities, employees' welfare, environmental protection and societal development. The mobile telecommunication industry in Nigeria has witnessed an upsurge in the level of competition, as companies in the industry (such as MTN, Globacom, Airtel and 9mobile among others) compete for market share. Consequently, telecommunication firms have device strategies and programme to not only outsmart competitors but also for sustainability and survival. Also, more companies are interested in investing money and setting up strategic CSR policies to achieve market leadership. The current study is therefore spurred to investigate how MTN Nigeria adopts corporate social responsibility practices to gain competitive advantage in the market.

1.2 Objectives of the Study

The broad aim of the research is to examine the effect of corporate social responsibility on competitive advantage in Nigerian telecommunication industry. The study particularly sought to:

i. Determine the effect of ethical responsibility on competitive advantage
ii. Ascertain the of philanthropic responsibility on competitive advantage
iii. Investigate the of legal responsibility on competitive advantage
iv. Evaluate the extent to which economic responsibility affect competitive advantage

Literature Review and Hypotheses Development

Corporate Social Responsibility

The concept of corporate social responsibility developed by Carroll (1979) refers to the economic, legal, ethical, and discretionary expectations of the society regarding business entities. According to Andrews (2016), CSR is a business practice which incorporates social and environmental dimensions in the operations of business and their interactivity with stakeholders. In this study corporate social responsibility entails business entities balancing their activities with the interest of internal and external stakeholders, including employees, customers, suppliers and business partners, labour unions, local communities, and governments. CSR therefore consists of all policies and procedures that help to advance the social conditions and environmental protection of a business and its stakeholders (Lee & Yang, 2021). CSR involves the conduct of business in a cost-effectively and efficient way while respecting the law and ethical values.

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The CSR Pyramid by Caroll (1991), indicates that businesses have to achieve diverse levels of responsibilities for corporate stewardship excellence: economic responsibility (a business must stay profitable); legal responsibility (a business is mandated to obey the law); ethical responsibility (businesses are required operate ethically and morally right); and discretionary/philanthropic responsibility (businesses donate voluntarily donates to the society).

Ethical Responsibility
Ethical responsibilities entail standards, norms and expectations of consumers, employees, shareholders, and the community, which should be reasonable (Alawiye & Babatunde, 2017). Companies involve in ethical responsibility by respecting norms, ethics and morals in the society that meet societal expectations. The goal is to avoid unethical business practices and comply with regulations by exhibiting integrity (Zhu, Liu & Lai, 2016; Ompusunggu, 2016; Maqbool & Bakr, 2019). Companies can engage in ethical business practices such as reduction in environmental pollution and provision of healthcare facilities to employees.

Philanthropic (Discretionary) Responsibility
Philanthropic or discretionary responsibilities go beyond what is merely mandatory or what the company believes is right (Chen, Hung & Wang, 2018). This involves making efforts that benefit society, such as donating services to community members, project implementation or charitable donations of money to e causes (Lee & Yang, 2021). These responsibilities are implemented by rendering assistance to the community, as regards education, health, the environment, religious and national holidays, public facilities (Wanjiku, 2019; Powei, 2020).

Legal Responsibility
Legal responsibilities of companies are the factors that are necessitated by the law through which firms must pay allegiance (Andrews, 2016). Companies must obey all rules and regulations that range from securities regulations to labour law, environmental law and even criminal law (Lee & Yang, 2021). Firms create wealth for shareholders by operating in line with clearly established regulations.

Economic Responsibility
Economic responsibilities entail the involvement of business in activities that embrace corporate governance, transparency, avoidance of bribery and corruption, payments taxes and levies to national and local authorities, dealing with suppliers, and local labour hiring amongst others (Powei, 2020). Economic responsibility strikes the balance between business, environmental, and philanthropic practices (Avaye, 2015; Maráková, Lament & Wolak-Tuzimek, 2019). In this context, companies try to proffer solutions that will facilitate expansion and engender revenue that benefit both the community and relevant stakeholders.

Competitive Advantage
Firms achieve competitive advantage by continually adapting to changing trends and external activities, skills, and internal resources. Competitive advantage is defined as having a long-term, distinctive and valuable competitive position comparatively to other competitors

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(Ardianus & Petrus, 2016). It also refers to the qualities possessed by firms that position them over competitors (Sameer, 2021). Sascha, Burtscher, Vallaster and Angerer (2018) stated that competitive advantages exist when firms provide same products and services at a reduced cost or benefits that surpass competing products. Competitive advantage therefore entails having superior edge in form of market leadership over competitors (Ardianus & Petrus, 2016). It is defined in this study as the ability of telecommunication companies to excel within the industry by offering unique and superior products and services over competitors while achieving adequate returns. They achieve this by upholding leadership position and distinguishing their products and services.

Nexus between Corporate Social Responsibility and Competitive Advantage

Properly implemented CSR activities are a source of competitive advantage for companies, including access to capital and markets, an increase in sales and profits, reduction in operational costs, improvement in productivity and quality of products, effective management of human resource, building corporate image and reputation, increased customer loyalty, and risk management strategies (Maqbool & Zamir, 2019). Companies that increasingly invest in CSR achieve competitive advantages such as corporate reputation, employee retention and customer attraction and loyalty (Wanjiku, 2019). CSR policies also assist in the amplification of a firm's advantage by enhancing the link between customers and other stakeholders.

A study by Ajayi, Oyeyipo, Apete and Dahunsi (2022) in Nigeria found insignificant effect of CSR initiatives on the performance of construction companies. In their study, Oboreh and Arukaroha (2021) found a significant effect of corporate social responsibility expenditure on return on assets, return on equity and net profit margin. Singh (2021) assessed the relationship between CSR and firm performance in Malaysia and found a positive correlation between CSR and organizational performance. Similarly, Mac-Ozigbo and Daniel (2020) found that CSR and profitability are positively and significantly related. Avaye (2015) reported that CSR helps to protect business environment and aid the local communities. Long, Li, Wu and Song (2020) averred that philanthropic activities do not necessarily generate economic returns for firms but enhance their long-term competitive position through reputation, legitimacy and employee loyalty.

Hypotheses

In line with literature reviewed, the study proposed that:

$H0_1$: Ethical responsibility has no significant effect on competitive advantage in Nigerian telecommunication industry

$H0_2$: Philanthropic responsibility does not significantly affect competitive advantage in Nigerian telecommunication industry

$H0_3$: Legal responsibility does not have significant effect on competitive advantage in Nigerian telecommunication industry

$H0_4$: Economic responsibility does not significantly affect competitive advantage in Nigerian telecommunication industry

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2. MATERIALS AND METHODS

A survey approach was utilized for the research. This is because its ability to collect various views from a wide range of the population. The target population includes 1,326 employees of MTN Nigeria in the corporate headquarters in Lagos. The population is made up of 980 junior level staff, 327 middle level managers and supervisors, and 19 top management staff. The study adopted a purposive sampling technique to choose the respondents across different units (departments) who are in a position to provide information on issues presented in the study. On the other hand, the study selected 250 participants through a simple random sampling technique and primary data were collected using self-administered questionnaire. The study used close-ended questions to reflect measures of CSR and competitive advantage. A pre-test was conducted to measure the validity and reliability of the instrument and the result of Cronbach’s Alpha coefficient indicated that all the constructs were consistent as thus: Ethical Responsibility (0.902), Philanthropic Responsibility (0.922), Legal Responsibility (0.896), Economic Responsibility (0.890) and Competitive Advantage (0.929). The data collected were collated, coded and analyzed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS version 23). The techniques of data analysis include mean, standard deviation and multiple linear regression.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The participants’ responses were presented and analysed using descriptive statistics (mean and standard deviation) and regression.

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics of Corporate Social Responsibility

Variable	Mean	Standard Dev.
ETR	3.74	0.630
PLR	3.89	0.606
LGR	3.63	0.793
ECR	3.71	0.633

Source: Authors’ Computation from SPSS Output, 2023

Table 1 shows the result of mean (M) and standard deviation (SD) on the variables used in the study as follows: ethical responsibility (M = 3.74; SD = 0.630), philanthropic responsibility (M=3.89; SD = 0.793), legal responsibility (M=3.63; SD = 0.793), and economic responsibility (M = 3.71; SD = 0.633).

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Table 2: Regression Result

Obs	250		
R^2	0.851		
R^2 adjusted	0.846		
Sig	0.000		
Variable	**β**	**t-value**	**Sig**
Ethical responsibility	.416	3.418	.010
Philanthropic responsibility	.576	5.669	.000
Legal responsibility	.436	3.959	.018
Economic responsibility	.439	5.212	.001

Source: Authors' Computation from SPSS Output, 2023**.**

Table 2 presents the outcome of how corporate social responsibility affects competitive advantage. It revealed that the coefficient of determination (R^2) is 0.851 and this implies that CSR accounts for 85.1% of variation in the competitive advantage while 14.9% of the variation in competitive advantage is accounted for by factors outside this study. The coefficient of ethical responsibility of 0.416 means that, if ethical responsibility is improved by one unit, competitive advantage will increase by 41.6%. For philanthropic responsibility, a coefficient value of 0.576 implies that if philanthropic responsibility increases by one unit, competitive advantage will be enhanced by 57.6%. Also, for legal responsibility, a coefficient value of 0.436 implies that if legal responsibility is improved by one unit, competitive advantage will increase by 43.6% while an increase in economic responsibility will result to 53.1% increase in competitive advantage of telecommunication companies. The result further indicates that philanthropic responsibility has more significant effect on competitive advantage.

Hypothesis one states that ethical responsibility does not have a significant effect on competitive advantage in Nigerian telecommunication industry. The test of hypothesis at 0.05 level of significance shows that β= .416; t=3.418; p=.010 hence, the null hypothesis was rejected. This implies that ethical responsibility has a significant effect on competitive advantage. The result is in agreement with the study by Buchholz (2016) who affirmed that ethical responsibilities enhance both the quality of goods and services provided by companies and their reputation. The result is also supported by Ikechukwu (2019), who found significant relationship between the variables.

The result of the second hypothesis indicates that there is significant effect of philanthropic responsibility on competitive advantage in Nigerian telecommunication industry (β=.576; t=5.669; p=.000) hence the null hypotheses which states philanthropic responsibility has no significant effect on competitive advantage was rejected. This agrees with Wanjiku (2019), Powei (2020) who asserted that philanthropic responsibility significantly enhances competitiveness through assistance provided by companies in areas of education, health, youth and sports. The implication of the result is that companies are able to outperform when they engage in community development projects.

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Hypothesis three tested the significant effect of legal responsibility on competitive advantage and the result showed that (β= .436; t=3.959; p=.018), hence the null hypothesis was rejected. This indicates that legal responsibility has a significant effect on competitive advantage. The result is corroborated by Andrews (2016) and Maqbool and Zamir (2019) whose studies established significant effects of legal responsibilities on competitive advantage among firms. This is supported by Lee and Yang (2021) who found that legal responsibilities significantly affect business performance.

The fourth hypothesis states that economic responsibility has no significant effect on competitive advantage in Nigerian telecommunication industry and the null hypothesis was rejected (β= .439; t=5.212; p=.001). This illustrates that the variables are significantly related. In corroboration with the result, a research by Mac-Ozigbo and Daniel (2020) found a positive and significant effect of economic responsibility on the profitability of firms in Nigeria. Wanjiku (2019) also affirmed a significant effect on economic responsibilities on competitive advantage. The implication of the finding is that profits realized by firms are invested in projects that benefit the society at large.

4. CONCLUSION

The study examined the effect CSR on competitive advantage in Nigerian telecommunication industry. The findings of this study indicated that CSR practices (philanthropic, ethical, legal and economic) have positive significant effects on competitive advantage in Nigerian telecommunication industry. The study concludes that telecommunication firms through philanthropic responsibilities contribute to the society to gain competitive advantage. It also concludes that ethical responsibility significantly affects the performance of telecommunication companies. The study further concludes that legal responsibility enables companies in the telecommunication industry to obey laws and regulations in the industry to remain competitive. Finally, the study concludes that economic responsibility has helped telecommunication companies to generate higher returns and profits that enable them to face competitors in the market. The study therefore recommended that telecommunication companies should always provide assistance to community members such as scholarships and embark on project that will benefit the society; telecommunication companies should produce products that are friendly and not harmful to the environment and sponsor actions that assist business communities; they should make profit that is reasonable to keep them in business but not to exploit consumers and they should always operate within the societal legal framework and adhering strictly to all rules and regulations governing businesses.

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