



Strategic Orientation and Organizational Learning of Telecommunication Companies in South-South, Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

This study examined the relationship between strategic orientation and organizational learning of telecommunication companies in South-South, Nigeria. The study adopted a cross-sectional survey in its investigation of the variables. Primary data was generated through structured questionnaire. A total of one hundred and thirty-one (131) was drawn from a population of one hundred and sixty-two (162) manager and supervisors across the regional/ corporate offices of four (4) GSM telecommunication firms in South-South, Nigeria. The reliability of the instrument was achieved by the use of the Cronbach Alpha coefficient with all the items scoring above 0.70 and 0.79. The hypotheses were tested using the Pearson product Moment Correlation Coefficient. The study findings revealed that there is a significant relationship between strategic orientation and organizational learning of telecommunication companies in Rivers State. The study concludes that strategic orientation positively influences organizational learning of telecommunication companies in Rivers State. Therefore, the study recommends that telecommunication companies in South-South, Nigeria should actively monitor and analyze their competitors' strategies, strengths, weaknesses, and market positioning. This analysis can provide valuable insights into industry dynamics, customer preferences, and emerging trends.

Keyword: Strategic Orientation, Organizational Learning, Telecommunication Companies

INTRODUCTION

Due to the growing need for communication services and the development of the digital era, telecommunications businesses in South-South Nigeria have witnessed tremendous growth and transition in recent years (Isabona, 2013). As a result, in order for these businesses to be competitive and relevant in the market, they now need to employ organisational learning and strategic orientation methodologies. Businesses that compete in larger markets frequently pursue differentiation strategies to set themselves apart from rivals, whereas businesses in smaller markets pursue cost leadership strategies to draw in more clients (Muasa, 2014). Additionally, the degree of market rivalry has an impact on whether a strategic orientation is adopted. Companies that are subject to fierce rivalry are more likely to use differentiation to set themselves apart from rivals (Deshpandé, Grinstein, & Ofek, 2012). Knowledge extension and internalisation as a component of organisational knowledge must be seen as a process of knowledge development and innovation (Bayo, 2019).

Companies in this sector must adapt to new technologies and shifting market conditions to stay competitive as the telecommunications business is always changing (Thomas, 2014). For businesses to be competitive in the telecom sector, organisational learning is essential. The following four organisational learning strategies, according to Rabbiosi, Elia, and Bertoni (2012), can help South-South telecommunications companies become more competitive: Acquiring information, sharing it, using it, and protecting it are the first four steps. The Nigerian telecommunications sector is marked by fierce competition; as a result, telecommunication

companies should make effective use of their knowledge resources to gain a competitive edge and improve their level of dynamic capabilities to act and adapt to the constantly changing demands and needs of customers (Bayo & Hamilton 2019). Getting information and data from a variety of sources, including rivals and clients, is known as knowledge acquisition. Disseminating information across the firm to improve employees' overall understanding is known as knowledge sharing. Application of knowledge to a company's operations, goods, and services is known as knowledge utilisation.

In the domains of management and company strategy, the idea of strategic orientation is essential. It describes the entire strategy used by an organisation to meet its long-term goals and objectives. Customer orientation, competitor orientation, and technology orientation are the three main characteristics that strategic orientation comprises, according to Hakala (2011). Understanding and addressing the demands of customers falls under the category of customer orientation, whilst keeping an eye on and reacting to competitors' actions falls under competitor orientation. On the other side, technology orientation entails using new technologies to achieve a competitive advantage. Organisations must establish a balance between these interrelated and mutually reinforcing characteristics in order to succeed over the long run. Hakala (2011) contends further that strategic orientation is an ongoing process of adaptation and renewal rather than a discrete occurrence. Organisations must continually assess their strategic orientation and adapt it in response to environmental changes. In general, businesses wishing to obtain a competitive edge and experience long-term success in the fast-paced commercial world of today must grasp strategic orientation. Therefore, the goal of this article was to investigate the connection between organisational learning and strategic orientation in South-South Nigerian telecommunications enterprises. The conceptual framework is shown below:

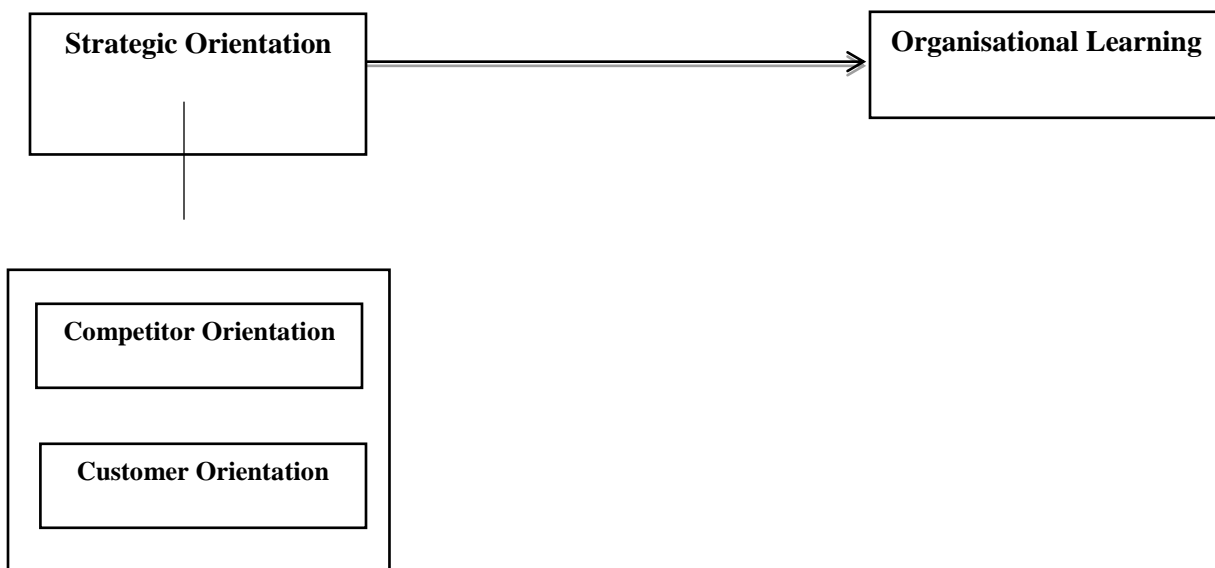


Figure 1: conceptual model showing the relationship between strategic orientation and organization learning.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Theoretical Foundation

Strategic Adaptation Theory

A strategic adaptation theory was created by Mintzberg in 1978, and it was later strengthened in 1985. According to Mintzberg's 1978 theory, adaptation requires managerial autonomy, little bottom-up adaptation, and close power relationships. According to Lumpkin & Dess (1996) and Tsoukas (1996), Mintzberg theory provides a source of information on a variety of topics related to organisational behaviour and strategic direction in general in businesses. The researchers accepted Mintzberg theory and connected it to relevant issues in their literature reviews. The Mintzberg idea has been quoted 207 times,

compared to 49 references to Anderson and Nielsen's hypothesis. Focusing on the references is done with the intention of using their work as a springboard for further research on issues like increasing autonomy to improve performance (Linder, 2015). When a corporation is strategically oriented, it adapts its business model to take advantage of the always changing market conditions. A business might choose to introduce a new product, for instance. The idea shows how a carefully considered strategy might affect particular businesses (Linder, 2015).

The specific way that businesses change to capitalise on external circumstances and survive is the focus of the adaptation strategy hypothesis (Boohene, 2018). The focus of organisational adaptation study is on an organization's ability to adapt, or how much a given strategy reflects an organization's capacity to adapt more or less (Boohene, 2018).

Competitor Orientation

Understanding competitors can aid an organisation in reorganising and improving its internal resources, business processes, and competitiveness in order to better compete with other market participants (Rodríguez-Daz & Espino-Rodríguez, 2006). According to Hooley et al. (2000), businesses with a higher focus on competition will adopt a more aggressive, outward-looking strategy (by building relational capabilities) and strive to sharply distinguish their offer from that of rivals (Kale, Singh, & Perlmutter, 2000). As a result, paying more attention to the competition will help the company develop the skills necessary to handle crucial client relationships more effectively.

In order to be competitive, businesses must gather market data on their clients and regularly monitor competitor activity using their sales force. In order to meet customer demands for quick action on possibilities and competition threats, businesses can thus get technology advancements (Siguaw & Diamantopoulos, 1995). By enabling an organisation to compare its goods to those of successful competitors, learn from them, copy their strategies, and improve on them, competitor orientation can increase an organization's competitive advantage (Drew, 1997). Contrary to the long-term advantages of customer orientation, empirical research on the relationship between competitor orientation and organisational competitive advantage has yielded vastly disparate conclusions. A favourable correlation between competitor orientation and organisational competitive advantage was found by Noble et al. in 2002. It was found by Harrison-Walker (2001) that there is no such association. Armstrong (2007) discovered a negative link between the two, but Luo (2001) asserted a curvilinear relationship existed.

A broader perspective of the organisation towards the market characteristics in which it begins to operate is linked to competitor orientation. A distinctive customer-facing strategy may result in a weakened competitive advantage and business strategy (Hunt, 2002). Therefore, Wensley and Day (1988) recommended finding a balance between a company's focus on customers and competition. Gathering data about the actions, goods, and market potential of competitors is competitor orientation. An organisation can better grasp its primary potential competitors' shortcomings, strengths, capabilities, and tactics with the use of competitor orientation. According to Mueller et al. (2001), businesses must evaluate their long-term shortcomings and strengths, as well as the long-term capabilities and plans of their present and potential rivals, as doing so may help them gain a competitive advantage and pay closer attention to their clients.

Customer Orientation

An understanding of customers is necessary for this. Extended customer understanding can lead to the creation of both new and existing items and can increase a company's chances of surviving the market (Zhou et al., 2007). It's possible to respond to competitor acts by enhancing current items and fostering stronger bonds with business partners. The ability to meet the wants and expectations of consumers is essential to any organization's sustainability. Focusing on the requirements and expectations of the client might therefore lead to increased market share and customer loyalty (Mokhtari, 2012). According to strategic management concepts, an organization's capacity to outperform its rivals in terms of customer satisfaction determines its success. To achieve this, competitive strategies should take into account not

just the demands and desires of potential customers, but also those of their rivals (Mohebbali & Farhangi, 2006). To put it another way, every company should be able to provide better, more affordable, and more inventive products quickly (Hejazi & Albadvi, 2005). In order to harness competitive advantage, experts stress the need of combining dynamic capabilities and strategic orientation (Smirnova et al., 2011).

According to Swift (2001), customer orientation encompasses all of the procedures and tools a company employs to identify, pick, encourage, create, and sustain its clientele. On the other side, customer-orientation is a business strategy for managing customers' interactions in order to maximise their long-term value and happiness, according to Brown et al. (2002). Customer-orientation is characterised as a system of values that prioritises the demands of the customer or as an organization's capacity and willingness to recognise, assess, comprehend, and address user needs (Deshpande et al., 1993). In order to provide greater value and customer happiness, it also refers to the company philosophy that prioritises customers during strategic and tactical planning and decision-making (Noble et al., 2002).

Customer-orientation is defined by Auh and Menguc (2005) as the ability to communicate customer knowledge inside an organisation, identify a plan to please the market, and put that strategy into practise throughout the entire business. It is for value development to comprehend the customer. It is the responsibility of an organisation to learn about the requirements and desires of its consumers, to develop a plan to address those demands, and to put that strategy into action. According to Mavondo et al. (2005), customer orientation entails paying close attention to the wants and needs of the client, giving high priority to after-sales operations, looking for possibilities to support worthwhile products or services, and routinely monitoring the level of customer satisfaction.

An organisation that is customer-oriented can recognise, categorise, analyse, and respond to the needs of its clients (Gatignon et al., 2002). This entails giving clients first priority. According to Mavondo et al. (2005), it deals with the capacity to add value for them by addressing their demands for present requirements and attempting to predict future needs. In this instance, the objective is to safeguard the current condition and behave with the consideration of the upcoming clients. Being proactive in order to address urgent client requests, concentrate on customer happiness, and provide continual improvement is known as customer-orientation (Han & Kim, 2000).

Organizational Learning

Individuals serve as the organization's learning agents in the intentional, goal-driven process known as organisational learning (OL). The "double loop" learning paradigm, which has been influenced by numerous developments in the social sciences and system theories, is a common perspective on OL (Argyris and Schon 1978). This fundamental learning approach's concept of imagining was its key component. The human process of "action learning" through experience, which involves multiple feedback systems interacting with everyone's sets of beliefs, was described in great detail. Organisational learning is a continual process that improves an organization's capacity to accept and handle both internal and external change. It comprises all of the knowledge that the workforce possesses as well as the integration and interpretation of new information that leads to the right course of action to boost performance.

According to Chiva, Ghauri, and Alegre (2014), organisational learning is "the process through which organisations change or modify their mental models, rules, processes, or knowledge, maintaining or improving their performance." Through focused activities, it seeks to adapt organisational processes (Templeton, Lewis, & Snyder, 2002). For firms working in unpredictable contexts, OL is essential to enabling them to react to unforeseen occurrences faster than their rivals (Garvin et al., 2008). OL is a source for the production of new organisational knowledge since it is by its very nature a process of developing new views (H. Cheng, Niu, & Niu, 2014; Chiva et al., 2014). Due to the complexity and dynamic changes in business contexts, this skill is continually rising in relevance (Loermans, 2002).

It is possible to think of organisational learning as a management effort that entails regulating and planning. Organisational strategic knowledge development, capture, and internalisation are some of its main focal areas. In order for OL to improve performance, information management is necessary (Cheng

et al., 2014). Knowledge management (KM) is a separate but closely connected field of study that focuses on systematic knowledge collection, organisation, and dissemination with the goal of enhancing organisational members' productivity and effectiveness (Alavi & Leidner, 1999).

Another way to think about organisational learning is as an intentional effort on the part of companies to maintain and enhance competitiveness, productivity, and innovation in the face of ambiguous technology and market conditions. In times of transition, organisations learn to become more efficient and adaptable (Dodgson, 1993 in Harcourt, Kayii & Ikegwuru, 2020). According to Grantham (1993), learning permits more rapid and efficient responses to a complex and dynamic environment. Learning also improves communication, comprehension, and the standard of decisions made inside enterprises.

Strategic orientation and Organizational Learning

Nieto and Santamaria's (2010) research shows that SMEs' interactions with customers have the biggest influence on their capacity for innovation, which ultimately results in greater performance. Similar to this, Lu et al. (2008) discovered that small vegetable growers can access regional and international marketplaces thanks to their contacts with clients. Prior studies have demonstrated that the interaction between businesses and their suppliers enhances the former's competitive edge. According to Adams et al. (2012), the interaction between SMEs and suppliers enhances SMEs' organisational competitive advantages, such as relative competitiveness, profitability, and market share, because sharing of information and processes, low appropriation and coordination costs, and greater efficiency all contribute to this.

Osore (2018) did a study on the effects of technology orientation on the performance of Islamic and conventional banks in Kenya. This study was conducted using a mixed-methods approach that combined descriptive, non-experimental, and causal approaches. The 43 commercial banks that were active in Kenya as of December 31, 2016, were counted in a census that was used for this study. Commercial banks also include Islamic banks, which offer Sharia-compliant goods and services. A questionnaire served as the main technique for this study's data collection. The processed data was investigated using both descriptive and inferential statistics. The findings show that technological orientation has a favourable and significant impact on Kenya's conventional and Islamic banking performance.

Additionally, Raila (2017) did a study on the strategic orientation and efficacy of small and medium-sized firms in Nairobi. The study used a descriptive research design. Simple random sampling techniques were utilised to create a sample of 416 Small and Medium Enterprises for the study, which focused on SMEs operating inside the Nairobi CBD. The information was gathered via semi-structured questionnaires. The gathered data was evaluated using descriptive and inferential statistics. The findings of the study demonstrated that the success of SMEs is significantly influenced by their entrepreneurial approach.

Mwaura and K'Obonyo (2018) looked at the performance and strategy orientation of Kenyan medium manufacturing enterprises. All 179 of Kenya's registered medium-sized manufacturing companies made up the study's target group. A basic random sampling approach was used to select a sample of 54 businesses from the general population. A semi-structured questionnaire was used to gather the study's primary data. A drop-and-pick methodology was employed to get the data from the sampled managers. Both descriptive statistics and regression analysis were used to analyse the data. According to the study, the performance of medium manufacturing enterprises in Kenya improves by 29.6% ($B = 0.296$, $t = 4.05$, $0.001-0.05$) for every unit of higher Market Orientation. On the other hand, a unit increase in customer orientation results in an increase in performance of medium manufacturing firms in Kenya of 24.1% ($B = 0.241$, $t = 3.35$, $P 0.05$), and a unit increase in technology orientation results in an increase in performance of medium manufacturing firms in Kenya of 18.8% ($B = 0.188$, $t = 8.95$, $P 0.05$). The reality that medium-sized manufacturing companies face new demands and opportunities was further proven. The survey also showed that businesses maintain open lines of communication with customers and gather data on each customer's preferences for distribution.

METHODOLOGY

The study adopted a cross-sectional survey in its investigation of the variables. Primary data was generated through structured, self-administered questionnaire. Primary data was generated through structured questionnaire. A total of one hundred and thirty-one (131) was drawn from a population of one hundred and sixty-two (162) manager and supervisors across the regional/ corporate offices of four (4) GSM telecommunication firms in South-South, Nigeria. The reliability of the instrument was achieved by the use of the Cronbach Alpha coefficient with all the items scoring above 0.70. The hypotheses were tested using the Spearman's Rank Order Correlation Coefficient. The tests were carried out at a 95% confidence interval and a 0.05 level of significance

DATA ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

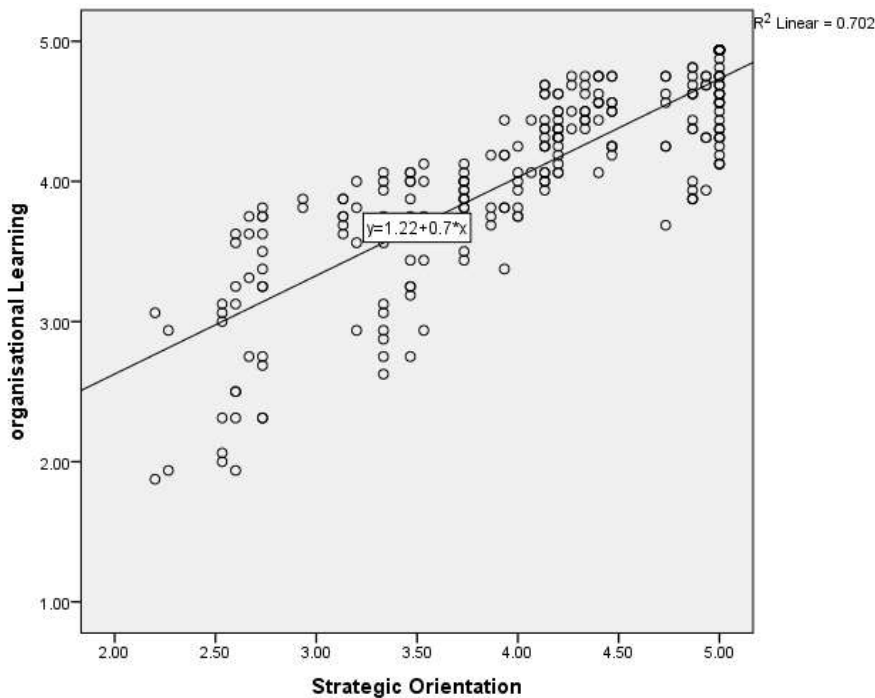


Fig 1: Scatter graph for the relationship between strategic orientation and organizational learning

Strategic orientation (independent variable) and organisational learning (dependent variable) are strongly correlated, as seen in Figure 1. The scatter plot graph demonstrates that there is a very high and positive correlation between the two constructions with a linear value of (0.702). The implication is that an increase in organisational learning also results in an increase in strategic orientation. Through the way the variables are concentrated, the scatter diagram has vividly evaluated how closely the pairs of variables are related. The pattern of the dots travelling higher from left to right provides evidence for the existence of a positive link. A higher value of the dependent variable is linked to a higher value of the independent variables, according to this positive connection. Roughly speaking, the slope of the regression line represents how strongly the dependent and independent variables are related. The scatter plots in Figure 1 display a positive gradient, indicating that there is a positive correlation between organisational learning and strategic orientation for telecommunications enterprises in South-South, Nigeria.

Table 1: Correlation for competitor orientation and organizational learning

		Competitor Orientation	Organizational Learning
Competitor Orientation	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	.833**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.000
	N	263	263
Spearman's rho	Correlation Coefficient	.833**	1.000
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.
	N	263	263

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

Source: SPSS Output

H₀₁: There is no significant relationship between competitor orientation and organizational learning of telecommunication companies in South-South, Nigeria.

Table 1 displays the findings of the correlation matrix between organisational learning and competitive orientation. The direction and intensity of this association are confirmed by the correlation coefficient of 0.833. The coefficient shows that the variables have a very high positive association. This link is significant at p 0.0000.01 according to the significance test. The alternative hypothesis is therefore accepted and the null hypothesis is hereby rejected based on the observed results. As a result, there is a considerable connection between a company's competition orientation and organisational learning in South-South, Nigeria.

Table 2: Correlation for competitor orientation and organizational learning

		Customer Orientation	Organizational Learning
Customer Orientation	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	.792**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.000
	N	263	263
Spearman's rho	Correlation Coefficient	.792**	1.000
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.
	N	263	263

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

Source: SPSS Output

H₀₂: There is no significant relationship between customer orientation and organizational learning of telecommunication companies in South-South, Nigeria

Table 2 displays the findings of the correlation matrix between organisational learning and customer orientation. The direction and intensity of this link are confirmed by the correlation coefficient of 0.792. The coefficient shows that there is a significant positive correlation between the two factors. This link is significant at p 0.0000.01 according to the significance test. The alternative hypothesis is therefore accepted and the null hypothesis is hereby rejected based on the observed results. As a result, there is a

strong link between customer orientation and organisational learning in South-South telecom companies in Nigeria.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

Results of data analysis showed a substantial and positive association between organisational learning and strategic orientation for telecommunications businesses in South-South, Nigeria. The results of this study are consistent with those of an earlier study by Jansen, Van den Bosch, and Volberda (2006), which looked at the connection between organisational learning and strategic orientation in Dutch manufacturing enterprises. According to the study, companies with a more proactive and creative strategic orientation were more likely to engage in exploratory learning, which entails experimentation, taking risks, and acquiring new information. This emphasises how crucial a strategic focus is for fostering organisational learning.

The results also align with those of another study by Chen and Huang (2009) that looked at the connection between organisational learning and strategic orientation in Taiwanese high-tech businesses. According to the research, companies with a stronger strategic orientation were more likely to engage in exploitative learning, which entails enhancing and maximising current skills and knowledge. The study emphasised the critical role that strategic orientation plays in influencing organisations' learning techniques and behaviours. In a study conducted in 2006, Lee and Kang especially looked at the relationship between organisational learning and strategic orientation in Korean telecommunications enterprises. The findings showed a correlation between organisational learning and strategic orientation, showing that businesses with a clear strategic direction were more likely to invest in learning processes and build adaptability to shifting market conditions.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The study concludes strategic orientation positively influences organizational learning of telecommunication companies in South-South, Nigeria. This implies that a strong strategic orientation, characterized by a clear direction, goals, and strategies, is likely to encourage telecommunication companies to invest in learning processes and cultivate a culture of continuous improvement and knowledge acquisition. This, in turn, enhances their ability to adapt to market changes, drive innovation, and achieve a sustainable competitive advantage.

Based on the findings the study recommends that:

- i. Telecommunication companies in South-South, Nigeria should actively monitor and analyze their competitors' strategies, strengths, weaknesses, and market positioning. This analysis can provide valuable insights into industry dynamics, customer preferences, and emerging trends.
- ii. Telecommunication companies should prioritize developing a customer-centric culture throughout the organization. This involves instilling a deep understanding of the importance of customer satisfaction and the role it plays in driving organizational success. Leadership should actively promote and reinforce customer-oriented values and behaviors among employees at all levels.

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