

Strategic Orientation and Customer Experience of Mobile Telephone Network (MTN) in Selected States in Nigeria

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Abstract

Strategic orientation is an important factor for organizations, sustainable competitive advantage, firm growth and financial performance. Strategic orientation is capable of creating organisational direction by charting the course of the firm's effort, by focusing the effort through promoting coordination, by providing people with an easy way to understand the organisation and by providing consistency and reducing ambiguity. However, the significant effect of strategic orientation is yet to be felt by telecommunication sector which has been attributed to privation of unstable performance in services quality, customer retention and customer experience. Extant studies on the performance of telecommunication companies have attempted to elucidate on the challenges of telecommunication and the attendant supposed solutions, conversely, most of the extant research focus more on developed countries than developing countries such as Nigeria. This study examined the effect of strategic orientation and customer experience of Mobile Telephone Network (MTN) in selected States in Nigeria. Survey research design was adopted. The first population was 357,325 selected Tertiary Institution Students, while the second population was 76 Top management MTN Staff. A sample size of 499 for the student population was determined using Cochran formula, while 76 MTN staff was determined via census method. Multistage sampling was adopted. A validated questionnaire was used to collect data. Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficients for the constructs ranged from 0.79 to 0.92. The response rate was 89.9%. Data were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics. Findings revealed that strategic orientation dimensions (customer orientation, technology orientation, marketing capabilities, market orientation) had significant effect on customer experience of Mobile Telephone Network (MTN) in selected States in Nigeria ($Adj. R^2 = 0.668$; $F_{(4,512)} = 260.381$, $p = 0.000$). The study concluded that strategic orientation dimensions had significant effect on customer experience of Mobile Telephone Network (MTN) in selected States in Nigeria. The study recommends that Telco companies should increase their commitment in adopting strategic orientation practices to the entire telco process and also embrace the adoption of technology orientation in order to accomplish continued and sustained customer experience.

Keywords: Customer experience, Customer orientation, Marketing capabilities, Market orientation, Technology orientation.

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Background to the Study

Telecommunication industry is a core component of modern economic lifestyle and has a major effect on economic growth and development. Telecommunication industry has experienced a rapid technological breakthrough and growth in the last two decades. Nowadays, mobile network technology has progressively spread worldwide positively affecting economic activities, thus enhance business performance. Telecommunication industry provides a technological foundation for societal and business communications which plays an increasingly vital role in enabling the participation and development of investors in developing local business to global economy. Despite the tremendous contribution of telecommunication industry to business performance, most telecommunication businesses in developed, emerging and developing economies still record unstable performance due to volatile services and customer experience.

Globally, telecom operators in the digital age are facing growing challenges due to internet-based networking platforms such as Weixin, Weibo and Twitter that have drastically reduced the conventional revenues of telecommunications providers for SMS and voice calls (Dastmalchian, Bacon, McNeil, Steinke, Blyton, Kumar and Varnali, 2020). The decline in performance of fixed lines has been especially strong in countries where the traditional cable infrastructures are not well developed. However, this reality is more evident in most developing economies. In Africa, telecommunications industry has been undergoing major reforms since the 1980s, especially in the past few years. The telecommunication sector performance is the result of a combination of factors such as regulatory governance and incentives, competition, ownership, and political stability (Cacciolatti and Lee, 2016). However, limited network access coverage remains a key barrier to mobile internet adoption. In Nigeria, the rate of network coverage is still adjudged to be very poor even in the urban areas when compared to other nations of the world (Pantano, Priporas, Sorace and Iazzolino, 2017). Lack of adequate network coverage and capacity are the leading causes that affect customer experience in Nigeria cellular networks, as it is one of the factors influencing subscribers' decision to switch from one service provider to another (Bankole, Ogundipe, Ogundepo, Oghogho, 2020). Despite having moderate network coverage in urban areas, the network capacity is still limited with respect to the various networks in Nigeria. However, network related problems such as network outage, call dropout are among the reasons why subscribers switch among network service providers (Danish, Ahmad, Ateeq, Ali and Humayon, 2015).

MTN Nigeria has also been significantly impacted by the recent recession and rapid currency depreciation (Khdour and Al-Raoush, 2020). The company is one of the largest revenue generators for its South African parent company, which reported that revenues from its Nigerian arm stood at R36bn (\$2.8bn) in 2017, equal to 27.2% of total revenue that year. MTN's Nigerian operations were impacted by currency depreciation in 2017, however, with revenues falling by 23.6% from R47.1bn (\$3.6bn) in 2016, as the naira depreciated by 11.4% against the South African rand (Lartey, Meng, Wang and Osei-Mireku, 2020). MTN Group reported that total capital expenditure in Nigeria rose from R8.7bn (\$671.9m) in 2016 to R9bn (\$695.1m) in 2017, although 2018's planned capital

expenditure was forecast to fall to R6.92bn (\$532.9m) (Al-Weshah, Al-Manasrah and Al-Qatawneh, 2019). Limited domestic network connectivity is a primary challenge facing infrastructure companies and broadband expansion in the country, and in November 2017 local media stated that Nigeria's submarine cable system remains underutilized, largely as a result of limited fibre networks hindered by right-of-way (ROW) issues (Alqahtani and Uslay, 2020). This is despite significant levels of investment in infrastructure, including Ntel's \$600m South Atlantic 3 fibre-optic cable, MTN's \$650m West Africa Cable System, Dolphin Telecoms' \$700m Africa Coast to Europe cable, MainOne's \$300m cable and Globacom's \$800m Glo-1 cable (Ullah, Iqbal and Shams, 2020).

The telecommunication industry is operating in a highly competitive environment and the interest, time and level of commitment to strategy development depend a great deal on the level and degree of competitiveness of the particular industry or environment in which businesses operate (Delshab, Kerwin and Cegarra-Navarro, 2020). A firm's strategic orientation reflects the strategic directions implemented by a firm to create the proper behaviors for the continuous superior performance of the business (Taneva-Veshoska, Drakulevski and Trajkovska, 2016). Strategic orientation is important in finding out the organization's chances and abilities support environment and to secure competitive advantage for itself (Tutar, Nart and Bingol, 2015). The choice of strategic orientation is often based on the tangible and intangible resources the company possess (Na, Kang and Jeong, 2019). In practice, this implicates that the strategic orientation generally reflects the beliefs and mental models of the senior executives in the company (Pantano, Priporas, Sorace and Iazzolino, 2017). However, some strategic orientations are constraining while others are considered as a supportive setting for a firm's capabilities to be more dynamic in responding to customer needs as well as environment changes (Bankole, Ogundipe, Ogundepo, Oghogho, 2020). Strategic orientation development is by nature complex, thus it must have clear priorities in order to be manageable (Tutar, Nart and Bingol, 2015).

In the recent years, teleco managers are becoming increasingly aware of the need to create value for their customers in the form of experiences. Customer experience constitutes a crucial factor that influences the customers' willingness to repeat the experience or to recommend it to their friends or colleagues (Gupta, Drave, Dwivedi, Baabdullah and Ismagilova, 2020). Pantano, Priporas, Sorace and Iazzolino (2017) emphasized that an experience is successful when it is capable of promoting customer engagement and creating memories within them. For this study, the major element that directly affects customer experience are customer orientation, technology orientation, marketing capabilities and market orientation will be the consequence from this interaction. Building customer experience becomes the foremost priority for marketing managers of the telecommunication service provider. This is a way to secure customer loyalty, expand the customer base, increase the company's performance, ensure the company survival and create a deeper connection with its customer on a personal level in the years ahead (Nobar and Rostamzadeh, 2018). Customers dwindling experience with telecommunications services provision in Nigeria is not unconnected with the

perception that some mobile operators are declaring substantial profits annually while providing poor quality services and charging high tariffs for their services (Williams, Shaw and Allen, 2017).

Multiple evidences from the strategic orientation literature indicate that theoretical development on the adoption of multiple strategic orientations has failed to catch up with contemporary organizational practices (Pscheidt-Gieseler, Didonet, Toaldo and Martins, 2018). Although many studies in the Management literature incorporated strategic orientation (Bankole, Ogundipe, Ogundepo, Oghogho, 2020; Cacciolatti and Lee, 2016; Sulaimon, Ogunkoya, Lasisi and Shobayo, 2015; Tutar, Nart and Bingol, 2015), the effect on organizational performance and the relationship between strategic orientations remains unclear. Some extant study found positive connections between orientations and organizational performance. However, the majority of the studies (Buzzao and Rizzi, 2021; Cacciolatti and Lee, 2016; Danish, Ahmad, Ateeq, Ali and Humayon, 2015; Dastmalchian, Bacon, McNeil, Steinke, Blyton, Kumar and Varnali, 2020) only researched the direct relation between a specific orientation and performance discarding variables such as customer orientation, market orientation, market capabilities and technology orientation that may potentially affect the relation between orientation and customer experience.

To address the aforementioned knowledge gaps on strategic orientations and customer's orientation, this study focused on telecommunication firm's customer's experience. The telecom industry is an interesting industry to study, not only due to its volatile nature in terms of technological breakthrough and its policies, but also due to the high growth rate of this industry over the past few decades and the significant contribution of the industry to the economies of nations. Based on these aforementioned, the study examined the effect of strategic orientation dimensions (customer orientation, technology orientation, marketing capabilities and market orientation) on customer's experience of Mobile Telephone Network (MTN) in selected states in Nigeria.

Literature Review

Strategic Orientation

Strategic orientation refers to the manner in which a firm adapts to its external environment (Chahal, Dangwal, and Raina, 2016). Strategic orientation is viewed as principles that direct and influence the activities of a firm and generate the behaviours intended to ensure the viability and performance of the firm (Hawrysz, 2020). Strategic orientation is the philosophy of enterprises which represents their attempts to reach higher performance and shows how a job may be performed with a set of values and beliefs. Strategic orientation is a group of value that consistently becomes the strategic guide for company in responding to the uncertainty of the environment faced by the company (Matsuno and Mentzer, 2015; Bodea and Dutu, 2016). Strategic orientation as an option that can create capabilities dynamically in a constantly changing business environment and enable companies to respond quickly to these changes (Buzzao, and Rizzi, 2021).

Customer Experience

Customer experience refers to a set of interaction that happened between the customer and a product, which will evoke the emotion or provoke the action or reaction (Gentile, Spiller, and Noci, 20017). From a telecoms best-practice perspective, Dikesh (2019) defines customer experience as the result of observations, perceptions, thoughts, and feelings arising from interactions and relationships over an interval of time between a customer and their provider. According to Gentile, Spiller and Noci (2017), the customer experience originates from a set of interactions between a customer and a product, a company, or part of its organisation, which provoke a reaction. This experience is strictly personal and implies the customer's involvement at different levels. Its evaluation depends on the comparison between a customer's expectations and the stimuli coming from the interaction with the company and its offering in correspondence of the different moments of contact or touch point" Furthermore, Meyer and Schwager (2017) defined customer experience as the inward and subjective reaction clients put together to any immediate or backhanded contact with an organisation.

Underpinning Theory Configuration Theory

This study is anchored on configuration theory as baseline theory for this study. Established by Walker and Ruekerts (1987). The configuration theory appreciates that a firm's level of leverage will influence its ability to build, integrate and reconfigure internal and external capabilities so as to address the rapidly changing business environments. Configuration theory therefore refers to an organization's ability to produce new and innovative forms of competitive advantage given market positions and path dependencies (Johnson, Sholes and Whittington, 2008). Eisenhardt and Martin (2000) explain the importance of configuration of the firm resources to adapt to the fast changing environment and therefore in business environments that are fast changing dynamic capability view explains the formation of firm's level of competitiveness. This is because, they are considered a transformer for converting resources into improved performance.

Empirical Review

King and Tucci (2012) found that firms can increase the probability of success in new market exploration, and the arrangement to integrate industry development during product development.

Amit and Schoemaker (2013), noted there is the need to grow a more cost effective process than competitors to reconfigure and transform their resources. Therefore, reconfiguration is generally considered a key orientation for monitoring market and development trends, and for timely feedback through resource alteration. Similarly, Zhou and Wu (2010) posit that having flexible strategies that deal with the varying use and reconfiguration of resources strengthens the positive effects of strategic orientation and thus improves firm performance. The configuration theory, though it appreciates the need for a firm to align its resources with a view to creating the necessary synergy, it fails to appreciate the role of adjusting the firm's operations to the demands of the market that are ever changing. The configuration of internal resources should be guided by the level of competition in the

market and not only the available resources in the market. Thus, the configuration theory was deemed suitable in studying the effect of strategic orientation dimensions on customer's experience of Mobile Telephone Network (MTN) in selected states in Nigeria.

Methodology

Survey research design and census method was used for the study. The survey research design is appropriate because it enables the researcher to collect data that represents the perception and view of people across a large geographical area, which in this case are selected Tertiary Institution Students and Top management MTN Staff. The adoption of this design is consistent with the studies of Feng, Wang, Lawton, and Luo, 2019; Lee, Che-Ha and Alwi, 2020; Peterson and Crittenden, 2020; Chu, Wang and Lado, 2016; Mediano and Ruiz-Alba, 2019. Therefore, this study followed suit by employing survey research design in this study. The units of analysis of the sample for the study were Tertiary Institution Students and Top management MTN Staff. The justification for the adoption of survey research design is based on the assumption that the group of the population under study is heterogeneous in its characteristics that is people of different ages, behaviour and opinion are represented within the study population. The appropriateness of survey research design lies in its ability to make scientific robust position on the respondents in one moment.

The first population of the study was 357,325 selected tertiary institution students, while the second population was 76 Top management MTN Staff. A sample size of 499 for the student population was determined using Cochran formula, while 76 MTN staff was determined via census method. Multistage sampling was adopted. A validated questionnaire was used to collect data. Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficients for the constructs ranged from 0.79 to 0.92. The response rate was 89.9%. Data were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics.

A structured questionnaire was adapted from previous studies such as Lee, Che-Ha and Alwi, (2021); Adams, Freitas and Fontana (2019); Morgan, Feng and Whitley (2018); Devece, Llopis-Albert and Palacios-Marques, (2017); Akintokunbo (2018) along the constructs with sections capturing demographic information, strategic orientation dimensions (customer orientation, technology orientation, marketing capabilities and market orientation) and customer's experience which was measured as a whole using a likert scale ranging from very high (6) to very low (1). The researchers developed a structured model for the study using the main constructs, and the data was analysed using multiple regression analysis.

Model Specification

In order to determine the effect of strategic orientation (X) on customer's experience (Y), an econometric model was developed.

$$Y = f(X)^n.$$

Hence the model was structured as such;

x_1 = Customer Orientation (CO)

x_2 = Technology Orientation (TO)

x_3 = Marketing Capabilities (MC)
 x_4 = Market Orientation (MO)

Results and Discussion

The objective of the study examined the effect of strategic orientation dimensions on customer experience of MTN in selected States in Nigeria. Multiple regression analysis was used to test the hypothesis with customer experience as the dependent variable, and strategic orientation dimensions as the independent variable. The data for strategic orientation dimensions were generated by adding all the responses of all items for customer orientation, technology orientation, marketing capabilities and market orientation, while that of customer experience was generated by adding scores of responses of all items for the variable. Data from five hundred and seventeen (517) respondents were analysed.

To test the hypothesis (Strategic orientation dimensions have no significant effect on customer experience of MTN in selected States in Nigeria), multiple linear regression analysis was used. The independent variable of the study was Strategic orientation dimensions while the dependent variable was customer experience. Data from five hundred and seventeen (517) respondents were gathered and analyzed using SPSS version 25 software. The results of the multiple linear regression analysis are shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Summary Results of Regression Analysis of Strategic Orientation Dimensions on Customer Experience of Mobile Telephone Network (MTN) of selected states in Nigeria.

Model	B	T	Sig.	F(4,512)	R ²	Adj. R ²	F(Sig)
(Constant)	2.360	2.800	.005	205.542	.785 ^a	.613	.000 ^b
Customer Orientation	.101	1.966	.050				
Technology Orientation	.269	5.578	.000				
Market Capabilities	.203	4.689	.000				
Market Orientation	.328	6.531	.000				

a. Dependent Variable: Customer Experience

b. Predictors: (Constant), Market Orientation, Market Capabilities, Customer Orientation, Technology Orientation

Source: Researcher's Field Survey, 2021

Table 1 presents the multiple regression results for the effect strategic orientation dimensions on customer experience of MTN in the selected states in Nigeria. The results revealed that customer orientation ($\beta = 0.101$, $t = 1.966$, $p = 0.050$), technology orientation ($\beta = 0.269$, $t = 5.578$, $p = 0.000$), market capabilities ($\beta = 0.203$, $t = 4.689$, $p = 0.000$) and market orientation ($\beta = 0.328$, $t = 6.531$, $p = 0.000$) have positive and significant effects on customer experience of MTN in selected States in Nigeria. This implies that customer orientation, technology orientation, marketing capabilities and market orientation are significant predictors of customer experience in the study area.

The results further reveal that strategic orientation dimensions (customer orientation, technology orientation, marketing capabilities and market orientation) explained 61.3% of the variation in customer experience of MTN in the selected States, ($Adj. R^2 = 0.613$). However, the model did not explain 38.7% of the variation in customer experience of MTN in selected States, implying that there are other factors associated with customer experience of MTN in the selected States were not captured in the model. Also, the results of Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) for regression coefficients used to test the overall significance of regression model has the value of 205.542 with (4,512) degrees of freedom and p-value of 0.000 which was less than 0.05 ($F_{(4,512)} = 205.542, p = 0.000$). This implies that the overall model was significant in predicting the customer experience of MTN in the selected states in Nigeria. That is, customer experience is affected by strategic orientation dimensions and the F value standing at 205.542. The result shows that at least one of the strategic orientation dimensions has a significant effect on customer experience of MTN in selected states. In coming up with the final regression model to predict customer experience of MTN in the selected States in Nigeria, the strategic orientation dimensions are statistically significant and were retained in the model. The multiple regression model from the results is thus expressed as:

$$CE = 2.360 + 0.101CO + 0.269TO + 0.203MC + 0.328MO \dots\dots\dots \text{Eq. (i)}$$

Where:

- CE = Customer Experience
- CO = Customer Orientation
- TO = Technology Orientation
- MC = Marketing Capabilities
- MO = Market Orientation

From the above regression equation above, it was revealed that holding strategic orientation dimensions (customer orientation, technology orientation, marketing capabilities and market orientation) constant (at zero), customer experience of MTN in selected States, will be 2.360. This implies that if customer orientation, technology orientation, marketing capabilities and market orientation take on the values of zero (do not exist), there would be 2.360 times level of repetition of the customer experience of MTN in selected States in Nigeria. The model shows that a unit change in customer orientation, technology orientation, marketing capabilities and market orientation respectively will lead to 0.101, 0.269, 0.203 and 0.328 unit change in customer experience of MTN in selected States. The results reveal that market orientation ($\beta = 0.328, t = 6.531, p = 0.000$) was the most significant predictor (among strategic orientation dimensions) of customer experience of MTN in selected States, since all of the regression coefficients is significant at 5% significance level as indicated in the table above, the null hypothesis was rejected. Therefore, the null hypothesis one (H_{01}) which states that strategic orientation dimensions (customer orientation, technology orientation, marketing capabilities and market orientation) have no significant effect on customer experience of MTN in selected States in Nigeria is hereby rejected.

Discussion of Finding

The findings indicated that strategic orientation dimensions have a positive and significant effect on customer experience of MTN in selected States in Nigeria. The result is in line with the study of Pscheidt-Gieseler, Didonet, Toaldo and Martins (2018); Firouzeh and Shadi (2018) that adoption of strategic orientation dimensions significantly affects customer experience. Similarly, Rizan, Balfas and Purwohedi (2019); Al-Ansaari, Bederr and Chen (2015); Meyer and Schwager (2017); Johnston and Clark (2018); Vargo and Lusch (2014) also confirm that strategic orientation dimensions have significant effect on the customer experience and performance of service firms with results pointing to positive relationship. The finding further assert that certain strategic orientation enhance business outcomes thus improving customer experience that will lead to performance.

Conceptually, past studies have substantiated that strategic orientation is the principles that direct and influence the activities of a firm and generate the behaviours intended to ensure the viability and performance of the firm (Gentile, Spiller, and Noci, 20017). In line with this, Boswijk, Thijssen and Peelen, (2017); Dikesh (2019); De Keyser (2015); Adams, Freitas and Fontana (2019) also confirm that strategic orientation is a group of value that consistently becomes the strategic guide for company in responding to the uncertainty of the environment faced by the company. Pine and Gilmore (2018) advised that organisations should adopt a strategic orientation to be able to predict the potential for external changes in the business environment and adapt to them.

Empirically, Ambad and Bujang (2018) found out that customer experience positively influence customer loyalty in the telecommunication industry. This is consistent with the previous researchers' findings, which revealed that customer experience has a significant effect on customer loyalty, both in the hotel and retailing industries. Subramanian and Palaniappan (2016) studied the determinants of customer experience in the telecom industry using confirmatory factor analysis: an empirical study. The findings revealed that customer experience is truly determined by factors like customer billing issues, indoor and outdoor network coverage, pricing of the operator, telecom industry signal quality, call and data connectivity, brand image and positive publicity of the brand.

Theoretically, the findings are validated by the configuration theory which is advanced by Walker and Ruekert (1987). Eisenhardt and Martin (2000) explain the importance of configuration of the firm resources to adapt to the fast changing environment and therefore in business environments that are fast changing dynamic capability view explains the formation of firm's level of competitiveness. This is because, they are considered a transformer for converting resources into improved performance. King and Tucci (2012) found that firms can increase the probability of success in new market exploration, and the arrangement to integrate industry development during product development.

Amit and Schoemaker (2013) noted there is the need to grow a more cost effective process than competitors to reconfigure and transform their resources. Therefore, reconfiguration is generally considered a key orientation for monitoring market and development trends,

and for timely feedback through resource alteration. Similarly, Zhou and Wu (2010) posit that having flexible strategies that deal with the varying use and reconfiguration of resources strengthens the positive effects of strategic orientation and thus improves firm performance. The configuration theory, though it appreciates the need for a firm to align its resources with a view to creating the necessary synergy, it fails to appreciate the role of adjusting the firm's operations to the demands of the market that are ever changing. The configuration of internal resources should be guided by the level of competition in the market and not only the available resources in the market. There is therefore an agreement among these studies and the result of this current research that strategic orientation has a significant effect on customer experience, as the various studies reviewed seem to have supported the positive association that exists between strategic orientation components and customer experience.

Conclusion and Recommendations

This research examined the effect of strategic orientation dimensions on customer's experience. The results revealed that customer orientation, technology orientation, marketing capabilities and market orientation had significant and positive effect on customer's experience. Immediate contact commonly happens in the span of purchase, use, and service administration, which is normally instigated by the client. It is also noted that customer experience emanates from a series of contacts among a consumer and a product, an organisation, or aspect of its company, which stimulates a response. Indeed, it has been established in extant literature that an experience takes place when a consumer has any feeling or information acquisition as a result of some degree of dealings with diverse components of a setting generated by the service provider.

Theoretically, the outcome of this study is in line with the configuration theory which was the baseline theories for this study. The configuration theory was adopted to guide this study variables because its perspectives are tied to the focus of the study and the variables that were investigated. This research paper recommends that Telco companies should increase their commitment in adopting strategic orientation practices to the entire telco process and also embrace the adoption of technology orientation in order to accomplish continued and sustained customer experience. Further study should examine the influence of strategic orientation, organizational innovation capabilities and strategic planning on the performance of technology-based firms. Further research should also focus on analysis of the factors which are the antecedents of strategic orientation in order to make an in-depth analysis.

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