

## Research paper

# Establishing Strategic Positioning towards Sustainable Competitive Advantage of Brewery Manufacturing Companies

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**ABSTRACT:** The study examined the effect of strategic positioning on the sustainable competitive advantage of brewery manufacturing companies. This study engaged the survey research design method. A sample size of 226 staff was randomly selected from the total population of 559. The study employed the stratified random sampling method. The research instrument that was used in this study is a structured questionnaire whose response format is on the five-point Likert scale. Both face and content validity were used to validate the questionnaire. To establish the reliability of the instrument, a test-retest method was employed. Data that was collected from the field survey were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistical techniques such as charts, percentages, correlation, and multiple regression analysis. The finding showed that strategic positioning explained 69% of the variability of sustainable competitive advantage. The finding showed that product differentiation ( $\beta = 0.164$ ,  $P < 0.05$ ) and continuous improvement ( $\beta = 0.034$ ,  $P < 0.05$ ), have significant positive effects on sustainable competitive advantage. The study concluded that strategic positioning has a positive effect on the sustainable competitive advantage of brewery manufacturing companies. The study recommended amongst others that companies should actively look for ways to sustain their competitive advantage which could invariably increase the value of their products and services. The study established that product differentiation is one of the most widely applied strategies in pursuit of competitive advantage, and it enhances customers' patronage. The study established that continuous improvement is one of the core strategies to achieve manufacturing excellence which is a critical resource for competitive advantage. The study demonstrated that creating customer value and constant delivery of high-quality products and services enhances companies' market share. The study established that providing unique products tailored towards the needs of consumers leads to enhanced brand awareness.

**Keywords:** Establishing strategic, positioning, sustainable competitive, continuous

## INTRODUCTION

Organizations today operate in a competitive environment which makes it necessary for them to put in place strategies that enhance their competitiveness. Companies that invest in well-informed positioning strategies are in a better position to compete for the scarce resources available and are better placed to deliver high results. Consumers are overloaded with

information about products and services. They cannot reevaluate products every time they make a buying decision. To simplify their buying decision-making, consumers organize products into categories that is, they 'position' products, services and companies in their minds. Products and Services are essential in our lives and some products/services sustain lives, some provide

safety, some of them provide ease and comfort, and yet some enhance esteem. Since human needs and wants are multitudinous the products and services that people look for keep growing in number. Such products and services are chosen based on considerations of quality, price, availability and what all they do to their lives (Sekhar, and Prabu, 2021).

Dependence of one on others for products and services— as individuals or organizations - is an age-old practice. The secret of happiness in the material world is to make products and provide services to others and be provided with products and services by others. It is humanly impossible for people to meet all their needs themselves without depending on others.

Sustainable competitive advantage inhabits a significant role in the strategic positioning of an organization against its competitors.

For Australian companies to gain a competitive advantage, they are more and more working towards positioning themselves strategically in the industries that they operate in.

In the competitive setting, organizations engage in different positioning strategies by involving in strategies that outdo competitors' barriers, competing successfully which would involve pre-empting rivals remaining unpredictable or by misleading them or by overcoming competitors' market-based moves (Bogers, Chesbrough, Heaton, & Teece, 2019). Its positioning has been in the global arena, in the need to leverage brand equity and achieve economies of scale towards decision-making in an increasingly competitive and transparent marketplace.

The more a company appreciates customer value, the better customer satisfaction and performance will be. This leads to more profit and a higher market share and of course, more loyal customers that will up the ante of your business. Market segmentation allows a company to target their content to the right people in the right way, rather than targeting the entire audience with a generic message.

This helps the company to increase the chances of people engaging with their ad or content, resulting in more efficient campaigns and improved return on investment (ROI). The goal of customer bonding is to develop a relationship and sense of community, including the customers so that they: feel welcomed, are more likely to continue patronizing the company (and its products or services), and are more likely to recommend the company to friends and family. When strategically positioning itself, a company reflects on the choices it makes, the kind of value it will create and how that value will be created differently from the competitors. This arguably requires a proactive mindset that concentrates on where the organization is now, where the organization wants to go and how to get there. Therefore, there is a need to study the effects of strategic positioning on sustainable competitive advantage in the brewery manufacturing industry.

## The problem

Even though a firm may have excellent products or services and skilled sales staff, its brand can still have trouble standing out in the market due to poor strategic positioning. A business can have little customer patronage, but it is not adding as many potential customers as it would like. Their strategic posture may be one of the reasons they are struggling to attract new customers. Even though businesses have strategic goals, implementing them can still be difficult because the process is typically unclear. Since it breeds confusion and uncertainty, a poorly defined implementation process makes it difficult, and usually impossible, to successfully implement the strategy. Every company, regardless of whether it operates in a for-profit or nonprofit sector, is tasked with developing a competitive edge. Organizations are increasingly attempting to establish a strategic position in the industries they operate in. The working environment is changing for businesses all over the world because of technological innovation and the adoption of new regulations. To strengthen their competitive advantages before losing the war to their rivals, the management of these organizations is constantly looking for innovative ways to conduct business. As a result, goods and services are essential to everyone's daily existence.

Utilizing a differentiation strategy has the drawback of making it difficult to alter customer perception. Many customers think the product is the same as cheaper alternatives that are available in the market. Companies frequently mistake overly complex solutions for a strong improvement plan in their haste to implement radical change or fix a broken system. Doubt and scepticism frequently take over when there is no clear knowledge of how to move forward. Failure to establish a culture of continuous improvement, a lack of stakeholder participation, and a business management system that does not support continuous improvement can all compromise a company's ability to successfully implement continuous improvement. Furthermore, even the greatest technological breakthrough will fail if it fails to understand customer value. Any price increase without a corresponding increase in economic value will decrease customer value since customer value is the gap between economic value received and cost incurred. Most businesses commit the classic retail market segmentation error of combining consumer groupings too broadly. As a result, companies will lose out to rivals who target customers by dividing them into more specific segments.

## Research Questions

- i. What are the effects of product differentiation on sustainable competitive advantage?
- ii. What are the effects of continuous improvement on sustainable competitive advantage?

## Study objectives

- i. determine the effect of product differentiation on the sustainable competitive advantage of brewery manufacturing companies
- ii. examine the effect of continuous improvement on the sustainable competitive advantage of brewery manufacturing companies

## Hypotheses

**H<sub>01</sub>:** Product differentiation has no significant effect on the sustainable competitive advantage of brewery manufacturing companies

**H<sub>02</sub>:** Continuous improvement has no significant effect on the sustainable competitive advantage of brewery manufacturing companies

## Review of Related Literature

### Strategic Positioning

The word strategy comes from a Greek word known as strategic, which was used in military terms and represents hard times which require the people in charge of deciding to make good use of the available and existing resources to win a war. Strategic service delivery implies a strong focus on competition, product branding and service delivery (Kamau, & Wafula, 2021). Positioning can be defined as a collection of creative activities that manipulates the consumers' mind in favour of the brand. Globally, organizations nowadays function in a legitimately competitive environment which makes it necessary for them to put in place strategies that improve their competitiveness (Kahiga, 2017). Organizations investing in positioning strategies are in a superior position to contest the scarce resources available and are well-positioned to deliver high results (Farhiya, 2015).

### Product differentiation

Differentiation strategy involves the development of strengths that can give a firm a differential performance advantage above other competitors. Differentiation strategy is where an organization attempts to gain a competitive advantage by increasing the perceived value of its products or services relative to the perceived value of other firms' products or services. An organization can differentiate its product by functional aspects, quality of the product, and price (Anekwe, Onudugu, Ndubuisi, & Akaegbobi, 2021). The firms specifically focus on either cost leadership or differentiation to outperform their rivals. An enterprise that has effectively adopted either a differentiation strategy or a cost-management strategy is in a stronger position to achieve superior contemporary efficiency (Voortman & Makhitha, 2014). Although the

differentiation strategy is based on product innovation or services that are distinct from rivals, cost leadership is mainly achieved by operational improvement and performance (Rupert, 2017).

### Continuous improvement

Continuous improvement is the ongoing improvement of products, services or processes through incremental and breakthrough improvements. These efforts can seek incremental improvement over time or breakthrough improvement all at once. Continuous improvement is a philosophy, permeating the Japanese culture, which seeks to improve all factors related to the transformation process (converting inputs into outputs) on an ongoing basis (Kifordu et al, 2020).

The modern global market has been placing huge pressure on organizations to continuously adapt proactive, innovative strategies for enhancing their capabilities (Njenga, 2017). Strategic assets of firms are vital ingredients for competitive advantage and in turn enhanced performance Terziovski, (2010) as cited by Simiyu, & Makhamara, 2020).

Corporate assets, as a source of core capability differentials, are both tangible and intangible (Njenga, 2017). Whereas competitive advantage is achieved by appealing to customers in a targeted market, sustainable competitive advantage is the outcome of a unique capability differential due in large part to leveraging the intangible resources of leadership skills and reputational assets that are more difficult to substitute or imitate by competitors than tangible resources, Kifordu et al (2020).

### Sustainable competitive advantage

A company is said to have a competitive advantage over its rivals when its profitability is greater than the average profitability and profit growth of other companies competing for the same collection of customers. What makes a competitive advantage sustainable are the behaviour and elements of the strategy that enable an attractive number of customers to have a long-term preference for the goods or services of a business compared to the services provided by rivals (Achieng, 2016).

According to Leonidou et al. (2015) competitive advantage results in performance that comprises: customer loyalty; superior customer satisfaction; enhanced financial performance and market share. Hence, the competitive strategy aims to outperform its rivals.

The three commonly accepted ways to create competitive advantage are differentiation, cost efficiency and focusing (Farhiya, 2015). It is frequently witnessed that firms position themselves grounded on their advantages, or strengths they have when they are likened to their competitors.

### Product differentiation and sustainable competitive advantage

Product differentiation strategy can be a tool for a competitive advantage that is adopted by organizations to provide products that satisfy individual customer's needs (Dirisu et al., 2013). Product differentiation can be achieved through image building, distinctive products, high quality, superior product availability, product reliability, and convenience in payment. Product differentiation is key for a firm in achieving competitive advantage. Porter (1980) as cited by Simiyu, and Makhamara (2020) postulates that firms with competitive advantages based on either cost leadership or differentiation can outdo their competitors. Subsequent studies agree that an organization successfully pursuing either a differentiation or a cost leadership strategy is in a better position to achieve superior contemporary performance. While differentiation strategy is built on product innovation or services that are perceived to be different from competitors, cost leadership is realized primarily through operational improvements and efficiency. Nevertheless, the success of any organization eventually depends on how well it implements its chosen business strategy (Rupert, 2017).

### Continuous improvement and sustainable competitive advantage

Nowadays, companies are seeking to constantly improve their level of performance. Thus, the continuous improvement of the performance in an organization plays a fundamental role. Continuous improvement has been known over the years as an approach with the main purpose of enhancing the performance of an organization or their processes. Furthermore, in a contemporary highly challenging environment, strategic control and continuous improvement system have been considered crucial factors for competitiveness (Yu & Lindsay, 2011 as cited by Simiyu, & Makhamara, 2020). To encounter the challenges posed by the modern competitive environment, organizations must pervade quality and performance improvement initiatives in all aspects of their processes to improve their competitiveness. Therefore, for achieving effectiveness, control and continuous improvement must be treated as a strategic issue in organizations and to make its proper contribution to profits, productivity, and quality.

### Theoretical framework

#### Competitive advantage theory

Competitive Advantage Theory was propounded by Porter (1985). The theory postulates that businesses should pursue policies that create high-quality goods to

sell at high prices in the market. Porter (1985) emphasizes productivity growth as the focus of national strategies. Competitive advantage refers to the capability acquired through aspects and resources to perform at an advanced level than others in a similar industry or market. The study of competitive advantage has attracted research interest due to contemporary issues regarding the superior performance levels of firms in today's competitive market. An organization is said to have a competitive advantage when it is executing a value-creating strategy not concurrently being affected by any existing or probable player (Karaba, 2012).

Critiques of competitive advantage theory such as Durand (2002); Mekić and Mekić (2014); and Omalaja and Eruola (2011) provide several interesting logical considerations on competitive advantage. They question whether competitive advantage is a legitimate scientific concept with results from their studies showing that competitive advantage is not a necessary and sufficient condition for superior returns; there is no falsifiable theory of competitive advantage without resorting to ideology and that at best, competitive advantage is a metaphor which is useful to the strategic management community. However, Liu (2013) applied competitive theory to enhance sustainable competitive advantage during turbulent business environments.

### METHODOLOGY

This study engaged the survey research design. The population of this study was 599 drawn from selected manufacturing companies. A sample size of 226 was determined using Krejcie and Morgan sample size determination table. The SPSS, inferential and regression analysis was used to analyse the data further.

#### Analysis

Table 1 showed the multiple regression analysis results for the effects of all the dimensions of strategic positioning on sustainable competitive advantage. It showed that product differentiation has a positive effect on sustainable competitive advantage ( $\beta = 0.164$ ,  $P < 0.05$ ). Continuous improvement which is the second variable has a positive effect on sustainable competitive advantage ( $\beta = 0.034$ ,  $P < 0.05$ ). Similarly, the table revealed as indicated that there is no multicollinearity because the VIF of product differentiation (2.263) and continuous improvement (1.566), towards sustainable competitive advantage, are below 10. Besides, the tolerance level is more than 0.1 where product differentiation is 0.442, continuous improvement has 0.638. The *F*-ratio in Table 2 tests showed that the variables of strategic positioning statistically predict the dependent variable (sustainable competitive advantage),  $F = 98.789$ ,  $0.000 < 0.05$ . This indicated that the regression model is a good fit for the data.

**Table 1:** Multiple regression analysis of strategic positioning and sustainable competitive advantage.

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.	Collinearity Statistics	
	B	Std. Error	Beta			Tolerance	VIF
1 (Constant)	-0.745	1.341		-0.555	.579		
Product differentiation	0.166	0.057	0.164	2.893	.004	0.442	2.263
Continuous improvement	0.032	0.044	0.034	.726	.469	0.638	1.566

a. Dependent Variable: Sustainable competitive advantage

**Table 2.** Analysis of variance.

ANOVA <sup>a</sup>						
Model		Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	149.388	5	29.878	98.789	.000 <sup>b</sup>
	Residual	64.117	212	.302		
	Total	213.505	217			

a. Dependent Variable: Sustainable competitive advantage

b. Predictors: (Constant), Continuous Improvement, Product differentiation

**Table 3:** Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. The error in the Estimate
1	.836 <sup>a</sup>	.700	.693	.5499

a. Predictors: (Constant), Continuous Improvement, Product differentiation

Table 3 showed that the change in sustainable competitive advantage was brought about by the variables of strategic positioning, and it is by 69% (0.693) as displayed by the adjusted R<sup>2</sup> value. The variables of strategic positioning explained 69% of the variability of sustainable competitive advantage.

### Tests for hypotheses

The multiple regression analysis was used as an analytical technique for testing the hypotheses of the study.

### Decision rule

If the probability value calculated is greater than the critical level of significance, then the null hypothesis is accepted and the alternate hypothesis is rejected. The P-value is the lowest significant level at which a null hypothesis can be rejected (Gujarati and Porter, 2009). Therefore, the P-value = 0.05(5%).

### Hypothesis one

**H<sub>01</sub>:** Product differentiation has no significant effect on the sustainable competitive advantage of brewery manufacturing companies

The *P* value calculated in Table 1 is lesser than the critical level of significance (0.004 < 0.05), the null hypothesis was rejected while the alternate hypothesis was accepted which showed that product differentiation

has a significant positive effect on the sustainable competitive advantage of the manufacturing companies.

### Hypothesis two

**H<sub>02</sub>:** Continuous improvement has no significant effect on the sustainable competitive advantage of brewery manufacturing companies.

The *P* value calculated in (Table 1) is greater than the critical level of significance (0.469 > 0.05), there was a need to accept the null hypothesis and reject the alternate hypothesis indicating that continuous improvement has no significant effect on the sustainable competitive advantage of brewery manufacturing companies.

Table 4 above showed the multiple regression analysis results for the effects of all the dimensions of strategic positioning on sustainable competitive advantage. It showed that product differentiation has a positive effect on sustainable competitive advantage ( $\beta = 0.164$ ,  $P < 0.05$ ). Continuous improvement which is the second variable has a positive effect on sustainable competitive advantage ( $\beta = 0.034$ ,  $P < 0.05$ ).

### Product differentiation and sustainable competitive advantage

Table 4 above showed that product differentiation has a strong positive correlation coefficient with sustainable competitive advantage ( $r = 0.645^{**}$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ). The Table further showed that product differentiation has a positive

**Table 4:** Multiple regression analysis of strategic positioning and sustainable competitive advantage.

Model	Coefficients				Collinearity Statistics	
	Unstandardized Coefficients B	Std. Error	Standardized Coefficients Beta	t	Sig.	Tolerance VIF
(Constant)	-.745	1.341		-.555	.579	
Product differentiation	0.166	.057	0.164	2.893	.004	0.442 2.263
Continuous improvement	.0032	.044	0.034	.726	.469	0.638 1.566

a. Dependent variable: sustainable competitive advantage

effect on sustainable competitive advantage ( $\beta = 0.164$ ,  $P < 0.05$ ). Hypothesis one test result ( $0.004 < 0.05$ ) showed that product differentiation has a significant positive effect on the sustainable competitive advantage of manufacturing companies. The result corresponds with Dirisu, et al (2013) finding that product differentiation strategy can be a tool for a competitive advantage that is adopted by organizations to provide products that satisfy individual customer's needs. Subsequent studies agree that an organization successfully pursuing either a differentiation or a cost leadership strategy is in a better position to achieve superior contemporary performance. While differentiation strategy is built on product innovation or services that are perceived to be different from competitors, cost leadership is realized primarily through operational improvements and efficiency. Nevertheless, the success of any organization eventually depends on how well it implements its chosen business strategy (Rupert, 2017).

### Continuous improvement and sustainable competitive advantage

Table 4 showed that continuous improvement has a moderate positive correlation coefficient with sustainable competitive advantage ( $r = 0.432^{**}$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ). Table 3 showed that continuous improvement has a positive effect on sustainable competitive advantage ( $\beta = 0.034$ ,  $P < 0.05$ ). Hypothesis two test result ( $0.469 > 0.05$ ) showed that continuous improvement has no significant effect on the sustainable competitive advantage of brewery manufacturing companies. The result contradicts Gonzalez-Aleu and Van-Aken's (2016) assertion that continuous improvement has been known over the years as an approach with the main purpose of enhancing the performance of an organization or their processes. Continuous improvement is considered one of the core strategies to achieve manufacturing excellence (Abbas, 2020; Jurburg et al., 2018). Therefore, CI is associated with comprehensive methodologies (lean production; six sigma; quality control circles; total quality management and employee idea systems) that utilise a dedicated work team to improve a process or system typically with minimal capital investment and over a relatively short period.

### Conclusion

The study concluded that strategic positioning has a positive effect on the sustainable competitive advantage of manufacturing companies in Nigeria. Product differentiation and continuous improvement have significant positive effects on sustainable competitive advantage. Product differentiation can be achieved through image building, distinctive products, high quality, superior product availability, product reliability, and convenience in payment. Product differentiation is key for a firm in achieving competitive advantage.

### Recommendations

1. To achieve effectiveness, control and continuous improvement has to be treated as a strategic issue in organizations and to make its proper contribution to profits, productivity, and quality.
2. The overarching purpose of a sustainable business should be to create customer value and, subsequently, to 'extract' some of this value in the form of profit, thus creating value for the firm.

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