CORPORATE IMAGE MANAGEMENT AND FIRM'S COMPETITIVE ADVANTAGE: A STUDY OF THE TELECOMMUNICATION INDUSTRY IN PORT HARCOURT

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Abstract

The study investigated the influence of corporate image management on firm's competitive advantage in the telecommunication industry in Port Harcourt. Survey design was adopted. Data were obtained from 38 managers in the selected telecommunication firms' in Port Harcourt, Nigeria. The questionnaire is the main instrument used for data collection. A total of 28 questionnaires was retrieved and analysed. Spearman's Rank Correlation Coefficient tool was utilized to test the hypotheses. Findings revealed that there is a significant relationship between corporate image and firm's competitive advantage. The study also shows a significant relationship between corporate identity and firm's competitive advantage, as well as a strong relationship between corporate reputation and firm's competitive advantage. It was concluded that building a solid corporate identity through media and personal contacts are important for sustaining customer loyalty. Also, a good corporate image is an effective way of staying in touch with maintaining customers, thus, requirement for maintaining customer loyalty. The study recommended that management should pursue policies which facilitate harmonious workplace, thus, fostering customer trust and satisfaction. It was also advised that efforts should be made by management to enhance the company's public identity through the use of media channels and face-to-face communication.

Keywords: Image Management, Corporate Identity, Competitive Advantage & Customers Loyalty.

1. Introduction

In today's business world, we witness a more fierce competition among firms due to many organisational and environmental factors such as globalisation and deregulation amidst increasing global as well as domestic competition and development of new technologies (Mohammed & Shahid, 2014). The chances a firm probably has to succeed would depend largely on whether its business repertoire not only matches the major success requirements for operating in a selected target market, but also capable of bettering those of their competitors (Aswini, 2013).

The business environment today is fast changing and becoming more competitive, firms are constantly faced with strict challenges in meeting with the ever-increasing market and customers unlimited needs coupled with its varying expectations, and coping with rapid technological advances. The search for new roads which lead to success and competitive advantage is becoming one of the major objectives of many companies (Czarniewski, 2015). Competitive advantage is basically seen as the ability of the firm to stay ahead of both potential and current competitors (Porter, 1985). Building a competitive advantage is not enough; the key to success overtime is building sustainable competitive advantage. Developing solid competitive strategies has become a very important factor that could contribute towards building a long-term sustainable success of any business organizations. A competitive strategy aims to build a profitable and sustainable position against the forces and factors that determine industry competition by identifying areas of competition in the highly dynamic environment, and employing strategies that match organisational capabilities to the changes in the environment.

Winning business strategies are mainly grounded in sustainable competitive advantage. The desire to gain competitive advantage is the main focus of organisational performance, as such understanding the source of sustained competitive advantage has become a major area of study in strategic management (Porter 1985; Barney 1991). Companies that are successful invest heavily in creating sustainable competitive advantage as it is the single most dependent contributor that gives above-average level of profitability. The goal of all business is getting a competitive advantage in relation to other competitors in the market (Porter 1985). Once competitive advantage is achieved, organisations will always strive to maintain its competitive position in order to ensure survival in competitive markets. Firms sustain a competitive advantage only for as long as the products/services they offer and the manner in which they present them have attributes that still correspond to the major buying criteria of a substantial number of customer is based (Duncan, Ginter & Swayne 1998). A competitive advantage laboriously achieved can be quickly lost. The company's ability to maintain the competitive advantage obtained depends on the speed with which competitors will be able to imitate and outperform. In search of sustainable competitive advantage which is difficult to imitate and can differentiate the firm from rivals, organisations have turned to intangible assets such as the firm's corporate image (Ade, 2015).

Generally, positive corporate image as a long term strategic and enduring asset empowers the company to create customer loyalty, increased sales, earnings, attract new customers, attract good employees, ability to obtain loans and increase stakeholders' trust in the company (Virvilaite & Daubaraite 2011). Therefore, organisations project an effective corporate image by building strong and supportive relationships with their stakeholders and understanding the various perceptions, expectations and needs of the various interest groups. Creating and projecting a favourable corporate image is far more challenging than communicating the qualities of its products and services to the public. The corporate image of a firm

communicates the organisation's mission, the professionalism of its leadership, the calibre of its employees and its role within the environment (Robert, 2002). Before anybody will agree to do business with a company, he/she will first of all asses the image of the company vis-à-vis its general perception by members of the public. As a concept, corporate image is based on the recognition that clients buy products not only because of their inherent qualities but also because of a bias, a disposition towards product of selected companies (Balmer, 2001). The corporate image of an organisation affects people's selection or rejection of its products. Since an organisation's corporate image affects stakeholder's behaviour, they therefore strive to develop and manage their images.

Corporate image management is an essential key to attain security and maintain public trust (Deephouse, 2000). It involves actions taken with the intention to create, maintain, and probably, regain a required image in the eyes of the stakeholders. Every organisation has its own corporate image, irrespective of the fact that such organization may or may not want one. If this image is properly developed and managed, the firm's corporate image could reflect the firm's level of commitment to quality, excellence and good relationship with its stakeholders including current and also its potential customers, present employees and future employees, also competitors and investors, governing bodies and the general public at large (Deephouse, 2000). The process of managing the firm's corporate image is an on−going, synergistic management tool, rather than a one−time corporate image exercise to enable sustainable relationship advantages to be developed with key audiences. Organisations that do not engage in successful image management increase the chances of failure (Aswini, 2013).

Much work has been done by scholars in the area of competitive advantage without much emphasis on corporate image management as a tool to achieving it in developing countries in Africa such as Nigeria especially in the telecommunications industry. Customer loyalty and customer retention are one of the most emphazised challenges confronting telecommunication companies. The occurrence of powerful competition in the Nigerian telecommunication industry has made customers persistently having to decide which service provider is more preferable and economical to them. This has led to price wars among telecommunication companies in a bid to retain existing customers and attract new customers. At the inception of GSM in Nigeria, in 2001, customers made calls at ₦50 per minute. The entry of Globacom into the telecoms market in 2003 with Per Second Billing (PSB) gave birth to a new era in the Nigerian telecommunications industry. By 2004, MTN and V-mobile (now Airtel) had no choice than to follow suit in quick succession. Airtel club-10, Etisalat Zone, Glo Flexi, Mtn Zone and other price-crashing initiatives have since been introduced. Operators are on continuous price war as they see them as a master strategy for gaining competitive advantage.

In the quest to be on top of the competition, mobile telecom operators in Nigeria are employing different sales promotion strategies. However, it is difficult to develop hard to copy sales promotion strategies. The initiation of a strategy by one company leads to its replication by the competitors. In 2006, MTN launched the Extracool package which was particularly introduced to capture the youth market with free midnight calls. This package was quickly replicated by the other networks; Zain (now Airtel) with Tru talk, Etisalat with Easy Cliq and Glo with Gloinfinito. Due to its ease of replication, sales promotion strategies alone cannot furnish the company with sustained competitive advantage.

The introduction of Mobile Number Portability (MNP) in 2013; which enables a subscriber to switch mobile service provider while retaining his/her existing number, reduced internet and call tariffs has increased the level of competition in the industry and service providers that are less competitive have been left down the ladder or completely eroded from the industry. Nigeria started its telecom revolution with CDMA operators. The likes of Multilinks, VGC communications, Intercellular were the darling networks of many Nigerians in the early days of the revolution. This stiff competition among the GSM operators compelled each to throw out series of innovative and exciting products for their customers at the same time lowering call tariffs and cost of SIM cards, the tides have turned against the CDMA operators and many of them are already extinct. In the early days of the competition between the GSM and CDMA telecom firms, Nigeria had sixteen vibrant CDMA operators, but today nearly all of them have gone into extinction, leaving just Visafone on the verge of collapse. Having identified these problems of competition, this study looks to solve the problem of how organisational competitive advantage is created and incorporated in an organisation.

It is in the light of the above that the study intends to evaluate corporate image management on the competitive advantage of telecommunication firms in Port Harcourt. The study's specific objectives include:

i. To examine the significant relationship between corporate identity and firm's cost leadership.
ii. To determine the relationship between corporate identity and differentiation.
iii. To determine the relationship between corporate reputation and differentiation.

1.1 Research Questions and Hypotheses Formulation

In trying to understand the relationship between corporate image management and firm's competitive advantage we asked the following research questions:

1.To examine the significant relationship between corporate identity and cost leadership?
2.To determine the relationship between corporate identity and differentiation?
3.To determine the relationship between corporate reputation and differentiation?

$H0_1$. *There is no significant relationship between corporate identity and cost leadership.*
$H0_2$. *There is no significant relationship between corporate identity and differentiation.*
$H0_3$. *There is no significant relationship between corporate reputation and differentiation.*

2 Review of Related Literatures

2.1 Conceptual Frameworks

2.1.1 Concept of Corporate Image

Every day, the constantly growing competitive business environment is becoming a big challenge for companies to sustain its operations and existence. Issues like innovation, dynamism in economic conditions, are becoming a big threat to organizational survival and sustainability. These fundamental changes have made organisations shift their focus towards intangible assets in an attempt to optimise budget, processes and financial performance, with the sole goal of gaining a positive, sustainable competitive advantage.

Howard (1999) defined corporate image as all the visual, verbal and behavioural elements that make up the organisation. Gotsi & Wilson, (2000) defined corporate image as a conglomerate of attitudes towards the company held by various stakeholders. Jack, et al. (1998) defined corporate image as an overall impression, a mosaic synthesized from numerous impressions formed as a direct or indirect result of a variety of formal or informal signals emanating from the company.

2.1.2 Corporate Image Management

Organisations have corporate image and when properly crafted and managed, the corporate image will accurately show the level of organisation's commitment to quality, excellence and relationships with its various constituents ranging from employees present and future to customers, government and other stakeholders. "Corporate image management is a systematic and multi-aspect process that entails plans and policies aimed at fashioning a positive image for the organisation's internal and external atmosphere, and eliminating negative thoughts and attitude towards the organization" (Russell, 1989: 3). Corporate image management brings about the birth of a corporate language, corporate traditions, and a dialog that focus on self-expression of an organisation in some way. This dialog is consistent with the expectations and understanding of all stakeholders of the firm including customers and employees about what the organisation stands for, what its main strengths, its tradition and principles are (Aswini, 2013). The concerns of both organisations and stakeholders are affected by a host of variables, including market dynamics, technology, and contemporary social and political issues, among others. The challenge for organisations lies in being able to understand these changes and continually adjust the organisation's image in anticipation of and/or response to environmental change. Furthermore, the multiplicity of organisational stakeholders demands a strategic approach to image management in which organisations attempt to present itself in terms relevant to all stakeholders, both internal and external (Aaron 1961). Although challenging, organisations must engage in image management in order to be successful.

The corporate image of an organisation if managed effectively will protect the organisation against competition from new competitors or current competitors offering new products and services.

2.1.3 Concept of Corporate Identity

The identity of an organisation is tied to its core values. Dutton & Dukerich (1991) defined corporate identity as what organisational members believe to be its central, enduring and distinctive character. Vanrel & Balmer (1997) defined corporate identity as organisation's unique characteristics that are rooted in the behaviour of members of the organisation. Markwich & Fill (1997) defined corporate identity as what the organisation is, what it does and how it does it and is linked with the way organisation goes about its business and the strategies it adopts. Corporate identities are created by organisational members, based on organisational values. Balmer (2001) defined corporate identity as the summation of those tangible and intangible elements that make any corporate entity distinct. Balmer further stresses that "corporate identity is shaped by the actions of the corporate founders and leaders, by tradition and the environment at its core being the mix of employees' values which are expressed in terms of their affinities to corporate, professional, national and other identities" (Balmer, 2001). Karaosmanoglu & Melewar (2006) define corporate identity as strategically planned expressions of the corporation that are communicated through clues given by company's behaviour and symbols. Corporate identity can thus be said to guide a

company's brand strategy. It is the corporate identity that employees and managers build on when making a brand unique and if the brand cannot be made unique, the competitive advantage and benefits of differentiation will be lost.

2.1.4 Concept of Corporate Reputation

Corporate reputations are based on organisational actions, and those actions are based on organisational members' co-creation of the organisation, based on their perceptions of what the organisation is, and its core values. Corporate reputation is based on external stakeholder's perceptions. Corporate reputation although often used synonymously with image is different from corporate image in that it is not an immediate perception of an entity but is formed over a longer period of time (Fombrun & Vanriel, 2004; Joseph, 2003; Gotsi & wilson, 2000). Nicole (2000) defined corporate reputation as the stakeholder's collective opinions towards an organisation based on its past records. Jack et al. (1998) defined corporate reputation as a perceptual representation of a company's past actions and future prospects that describes the firm's overall appeal to key constituents compared to other leading rivals. Consumers in their product or service preferences are affected by their past experiences. Corporate reputation is a form of intangible asset holding a value to the organisations that hold it, developed through sustained social interactions in which past impressions affect future behaviours. Corporate reputation helps organisations to achieve differentiated positioning, safeguard the organisation in times of crises and develop legitimacy in the market place by providing competitive benefits. A favourable corporate reputation rests on competing successfully in the market place, achieving a familiar and positive image, building an ethical and high performance work culture, and communicating widely with various stakeholders (Deephouse, 2000; Fombrun & Van Riel, 2004). A positive corporate reputation will increasingly influence purchase decisions when there is little difference in price, quality design and product. Corporate reputation can be damaged quickly given increasing media scrutiny and global coverage and communication via internet. The evidence indicates significant financial costs to organisations from damaged reputations resulting from misconduct or faulty products.

2.1.5 Competitive Advantage

Today's business organisations operate in a hyper-competitive global market which is characterized by extreme turbulence and rapid evolutionary change that provide greater opportunities as well as greater challenges to managers. Organisations are in a state of continuous flux occasioned by the competitive war in the market place. New firms in the same business spring up daily to offer virtually the same product or services thus, reducing the market place for already existing competitors and increasing the stakes for their survival (Afolabi & Ojo, 2015). Consequently, only the tough get going. Different scholars have defined competitive advantage in different ways making it very difficult to have a particular definition of competitive advantage.

Porter (1985) first introduced the term competitive advantage and described it as being at the heart "of a firm's performance in competitive markets. After several decades of vigorous expansion and prosperity, however many firms lost sight of competitive advantage in their scramble for growth and pursuit of diversification. Today the importance of competitive advantage could hardly be greater. Firms throughout the world face slower growth as well as domestic and global competitors that are no longer acting as if the expanding pie were big enough for all (Porter, 1985).

Porter (1985) further went on to say "Competitive advantage grows fundamentally out of the value a firm is able to create for its buyers that exceeds the firm's cost of creating it". Barney (1991) defined competitive advantage as the implementation of a value creating strategy that is not simultaneously being implemented by any current or potential competitors. Akman & Yilmas (2008) defined competitive advantage as an organisation's ability to perform in one or more ways that competitors cannot or will not match. Thompson & Strickland (1998) defined competitive advantage as the condition when the organisation has an edge over their rivals in attracting customers and defending its position against competitive forces. Peteraf and Barney (2003) see competitive advantage as an enterprise being able to create more economic value than the marginal (breakeven) competitor in its product market. Leitch & Motion (1999) defined Competitive advantage as superior performance outcomes and superiority in production resources. Passemard & Calantone (2000) define competitive advantage as successfully implemented strategies that lift a firm to superior performance to outperform current and potential players.

The above definitions signify competitive advantage as the ability to stay ahead of present or potential competition. It also provides the understanding that resources held by a firm and its strategies will have a profound impact on generating competitive advantage. Building a competitive advantage alone is not enough; the key to success overtime is building and maintaining a sustainable competitive advantage.

2.1.6 Sustainable Competitive Advantage

The fundamental basis of long-run success of a firm is the achievement and maintenance of a sustainable competitive advantage. Sustainable competitive advantage is different from competitive advantage because it provides a long term advantage that is not easily replicated. (don't make such claims)

> *A firm is said to have sustained competitive advantage when it is implementing a value creating strategy not simultaneously being implemented by any current or potential competitors and when other firms are unable to duplicate the benefits of the strategy Barney (1991: 102).*

Hofer and Schendel (1978) defined sustained competitive advantage as the unique position that an organisation develops in relation to competitors that allows it to outperform them consistently. Barney (1991) maintains that a firm will obtain sustainable competitive advantage over her competitors by implementing strategies that utilize their inner strengths, only if they can respond to environmental opportunities and at the same time neutralising external threats and avoiding internal weaknesses. In order to obtain a holistic perspective of the firm's internal strengths and weaknesses and uncover the external threats and opportunities, organisations perform a SWOT analysis in order to analyse the competitive position of the firm. SWOT analysis uses the SWOT matrix to access both internal and external aspects of conducting business in a particular environment.

2.1.7 The Concept Cost Leadership and Differentiation

Cost leadership is defined as a business strategy wherein a firm sets out to become the low-cost producer in its industry (Porter 1980, 2004). Striving to be the low-cost producer is a powerful competitive approach in markets where many buyers are price-sensitive. The aim is to open a sustainable cost advantage over competitors and then use lower costs as a basis for either under pricing competitors and gaining market share at their expense or earning a higher profit margin selling at the going price (Porter, 1980). Organizations can achieve cost

leadership by out-managing rivals in mass production, mass distribution, the construction of efficient scale facilities (economies of scale), rigorous pursuit of cost reductions from experience (experience curve), tight cost and overhead control, avoidance of marginal customer accounts combined with finding creative ways to cut cost-producing activities out of the activity-cost chain (Russell, 1989; Waidi, 2014). According to Irakli, (2012) and Akan (2006) Process, Research & Development, backward vertical integrations and process automation can be pursued to reduce costs. Firms that achieve low-cost leadership typically make low cost relative to competitors the theme of the entire business strategy- though the firm must be careful not to pursue low cost so zealously that their products end up being too stripped down and cheaply made to generate buyer appeal (Mukesh, et al. 2013). If a firm can achieve and sustain overall cost leadership, then it will be an above-average performer in its industry provided and it can command prices at or near the industry average (Nicole, 2000). A low-cost leader is in the strongest position to set the floor on market price and still earn profit which erects barriers around its market position (Hyatt, 2001). A competitive power of low-cost leadership is greatest when rivals' products are essentially identical, price competition dominates, most buyers use the products similarly and want similar features, buyer switching costs are low, an large customers shop aggressively for the best price. Furthermore, Russell (1989) and Robert (2002) maintained that cost leaders try to supply a standard, no-frills, high volume product at the most competitive selling price.

In a differentiation strategy, a firm seeks to be unique in its industry along some dimensions that are widely valued by buyers. The firm selects one or more attributes that many buyers in the industry perceive as important, and uniquely positions itself to supply those needs (Porter 1980, 2004). Therefore, a firm seeking to succeed through differentiation must study needs and behaviour carefully to learn what buyers consider important, what they think has value and what they are willing to pay for (Barney 2007). In the differentiation strategy, the customers look at the attributes of the products other than looking at the price (Waidi, 2014). The firm is therefore rewarded for its uniqueness with a premium price. A firm that can achieve and maintain differentiation will be an above- average performer in its industry if its price premium exceeds the extra costs incurred in being unique (Porter, 1980). A differentiator, therefore, must always seek ways of differentiating that lead to a price premium greater than the cost of differentiating. The logic of differentiation strategy requires that the firm choose attributes in which to differentiate itself that are different from its rivals. Approaches to differentiation can take many forms; design and corporate image, technology, features, customer service, dealer network and other dimensions. Ideally, the firm differentiates itself along several dimensions. The most appealing approaches to differentiation are those that are hard or expensive for rivals to duplicate.

2.2 Theoretical Framework

Cornelissen and Harris (2001) group-authored theoretical perceptions of corporate identity into three metaphorical perspectives notably, 'corporate identity as an expression of corporate personality', 'corporate identity as organizational reality' and 'corporate identity as all the expressions of a company'. The first **metaphorical theory** credited conceptual definitions, which positioned corporate identity mainly in the light of corporate personality philosophy and as the presentation of organizational characteristics which reside at the heart of an organization's corporate identity as viewed by valued stakeholders. Cornelissen and Harris (2001) broadened this framework incorporating definitions confining corporate identity to the manifestation of perceptions, corporate image and reputation formed in the minds of stakeholders.

The second perspective *(i.e. **corporate identity as 'organizational reality')*** theory brings life to the first perspective with the addition of an intentional aspect – which is embodying and epitomizing the 'factual' identity or the internal organizational characteristics. As Cornelissen and Harris (1997) argue, authors belonging to this scholarship contend that organizations have a factual identity or an internal personality or characteristic akin to an actual organism similar to a real-life person. The internalities in this regard include corporate strategy business scope (Downey, 1986), the range and types of products and services offered, corporate and product performance (Mohammed & Shahid, 2014), internal systems and structures, core values and a company's communication, both formal and informal. For Cornelissen and Harris (2001) the semantic shift in author constructs of corporate identity might have been triggered by changes in usage of the term identity from 'sameness' in expressions to 'essences' and 'properties'. Authors in this line of thought defined corporate identity as a set of interdependent characteristics of the company that give its specificity, stability and coherence

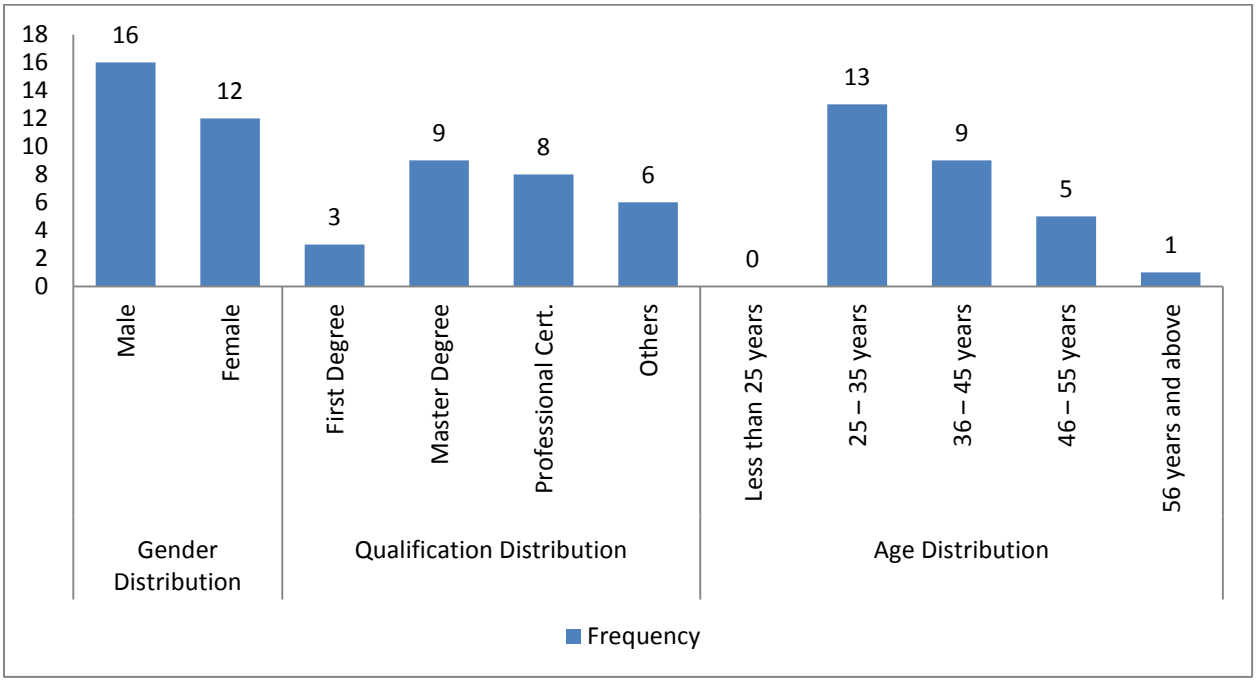
Cornelissen and Harris (2001) **theorized the third viewpoint of corporate identity as 'all expressions of a company'** particularly as they relate to the dualistic conceptions of corporate image and reality and that corporate identity emerges in the course of all organizational activities. Authors holding this view assume that corporate identity emerges in the course of social interaction and that there may be an emergence of multiple identities in the course of such interaction. This is close to the rhetorical or symbolic interactions' view of communication in which signs and symbols issued by a company do not so much designate objects but rather constitute them. Meaning in Cornelissen and Harris's (2001) view thus cannot be objectively transferred but is created by organizations in the course of various forms of organizational communication. Authors in this scholarship believe that corporate identity can be created, transformed (Gioia & Thomas, 1996), restructured and that organizations have to achieve a defined standard of consistency to create desired impressions with stakeholders over a period of time in order to establish viable reputations and a high degree of credibility and trust. Authors belonging to this discipline believe that the meaning of corporate identity does not necessarily have to refer to any inner values or essence.

3 Methodology

The cross-sectional survey method, a form of quasi-experimental design, is considered most appropriate for this study. The population studied in this work comprised of 32 managers in the Telecommunications Industry in Port-Harcourt, Rivers state of Nigeria. The population was restricted to the Managers and HODs in this industry in view of the responses required in the study, which can only be provided by top echelon and senior staff of the organisations, particularly as they relate to corporate image management and firm's competitive advantage. The entire population was studied since it was relatively a small number, so there was no need for sample size determination. Primary data was utilized in the study hence the questionnaire was the main instrument for collecting primary data in this study. The questionnaire was adopted from a mixture of instruments for measuring various aspects of the study. The questionnaire was personally administered, through the use of resource persons, to the randomly chosen Management staff.

4 Data Analysis and Presentation

The demographic characteristics of our respondents covered respondent's gender, age and highest qualification obtained. Since demographic information is nominal and ordinal data, we presented the data using a frequency table, and bar chart.



4.1 Primary level of Analysis

In the presentation of the results for the primary data, descriptive measures such as mean scores and standard deviation are used to illustrate the distribution of each variable (independent and dependent). The independent variable – corporate image is measured using two dimensions namely – corporate identity and corporate reputation. Each variable is scaled on a consistent 3 –item instrument and on a 5 – point Likert scale. This rule also applies to the scaling of the dependent variable - Organizational competitive advantage.

Table 4.2 Dimensions of corporate image

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Identity	28	1.00	5.00	4.0821	.86510
Reputation	28	1.00	5.00	4.3941	.88710
Valid N (list wise)	28				

Source: data output

Table 4.2 above illustrates the descriptive statistics for the independent variable which is corporate image and its dimensions namely – corporate identity and corporate reputation. The results indicate high mean scores of values x>3.00 for the two dimensions therefore based on the structure of the scale this implies a tendency for positive affirmation to the indicators and the variables.

Table 4.3 Dimensions of organizational competitive advantage

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Cost	28	1.00	5.00	4.0801	.73511
Differentiation	28	1.00	5.00	4.0222	.90182
Valid N (list wise)	28				

Source: Data output

Table 4.3 above illustrates the descriptive statistics for the dependent variable which is organizational competitive advantage and its dimensions namely – cost leadership, differentiation and market share. The results indicate high mean scores of values x>3.00 for the two dimensions, therefore, based on the structure of the scale, this implies a tendency for positive affirmation to the indicators and the variables.

Table 4.4 Analysis on the study variables

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Image	28	1.00	5.00	4.2381	.70882
Competitiveness	28	1.00	5.00	4.1014	.91724
Valid N (list wise)	28				

Source: Data output

Table 4.4 above summarizes the descriptive statistics for the independent variable – corporate image and the dependent variable – organizational competitive advantage. The results indicate mean scores of x > 3.00 thereby implying relatively high levels of affirmation to the positive tendencies of the variables as observed in the organization.

4.2 Hypotheses Testing

The test for hypotheses was carried out using the Spearman rank order correlation at a 95% confidence interval and a criterion of p<0.05 for significance. A total of six null hypotheses are tested (two-tailed).

Table 4.5 Hypothesis one

			Cost
Spearman's rho	Identity	Correlation Coefficient	.672**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000
		N	28

Source: data output

HO_1: There is no significant relationship between corporate identity and cost leadership (rho = .672, P = .000<0.05)

The findings for the association between corporate reputation and cost leadership indicate a strong and significant relationship between both variables given the correlation coefficients, therefore, the null hypothesis is on this basis rejected.

Table 4.6 Hypothesis two

			differentiation
Spearman's rho	Identity	Correlation Coefficient	.509**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000
		N	28

Source: data output

HO_2: There is no significant relationship between corporate identity and differentiation (rho = .509, P = .000<0.05)

The findings for the association between corporate reputation and differentiation indicate a strong and significant relationship between both variables given the correlation coefficients, therefore, the null hypothesis is on this basis rejected.

Table 4.7 Hypothesis four

			Cost
Spearman's rho	Reputation	Correlation Coefficient	.801**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000
		N	28

Source: data output

HO_3: There is no significant relationship between corporate reputation and cost leadership (rho = .801, P = .000<0.05)

The findings for the association between corporate reputation and cost leadership indicate a strong and significant relationship between both variables given the correlation coefficients, therefore, the null hypothesis is on this basis rejected.

Table 4.8 showing the decision table

Hypotheses (Null)	**Significance (0.05)**	**Decision**
There is no significant relationship between corporate identity and cost leadership	P = .000 <0.05	Reject
There is no significant relationship between corporate identity and differentiation	P = .000 <0.05	Reject
There is no significant relationship between corporate reputation and cost leadership	P = .000<0.05	Reject

Source: data output

4.3 Results and Findings

The study examined the effect of corporate image on organizational competitive advantage with findings indicating significant levels of association between both variables. The results of the study imply that for management to sustain its growth rate as well as achieve competitiveness, the corporate image should be encouraged through adequate policies enabling opportunities for enhanced image identity and reputation such that the advantages accruing from cost leadership, differentiation and market share are achieved and operational activities which further facilitate growth are achieved. The results of the analysis are stipulated as follows:

The findings show a significant relationship between corporate identity and organizational competitive advantage a 95% confidence interval and a 0.05 level of significance. The analysis is correlation and two-tailed using the Spearman rank order correlation. As a result of the analysis and based on the decision rule of $p = 0.000<0.05$ for rejecting the null hypothesis, we therefore reject all previously hypothesized null associations as the study finds that corporate identity strongly influences the competitive advantage of the organization.

The findings show a significant relationship between corporate reputation and organizational competitive advantage at a 95% confidence interval and a 0.05 level of significance. The analysis is correlational and two-tailed using the Spearman rank order correlation. As a result of the analysis and based on the decision rule of $p = 0.000<0.05$ for rejecting the null hypothesis, we therefore reject all previously hypothesized null associations as the study finds that corporate reputation strongly influences the competitive advantage of the organization.

5 Conclusions and Recommendations

The concern of this research was to investigate the relationship between corporate image and organizational competitive advantage. Results from the analysis reveal significant levels of association between the dimensions of corporate image – corporate identity and corporate reputation and the dependent variable– organizational competitive advantage. It was seen that communication are encouraged in order to effectively achieve and sustain customer base and differentiation. Building a solid corporate identity through media and personal contacts are important for sustaining customer loyalty.

Generally, the effective portrayal of the company as being reputable is necessary for achieving patronages and brand advocacy which further increase customer base and market share. This is so because a good corporate image is an effective way of staying in touch with customers, thus, a requirement for maintaining customer loyalty.

In view of the findings, the following recommendations are offered:

- Management should practice effective customer follow up through the maintenance of customer database and records.
- The organizational atmosphere should be structured by management in such a way that supports, appreciates and recognizes repeat customers and related their issues.
- Management should pursue policies which facilitate harmonious workplace, thus, fostering customer trust and satisfaction.
- Effort should be made by management to enhance the company's public identity through the use of media channels and face-to-face communication.

- Effort should be made to ensure that good and quality performance is maintained as a means to sustaining customer goodwill and corporate image.

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